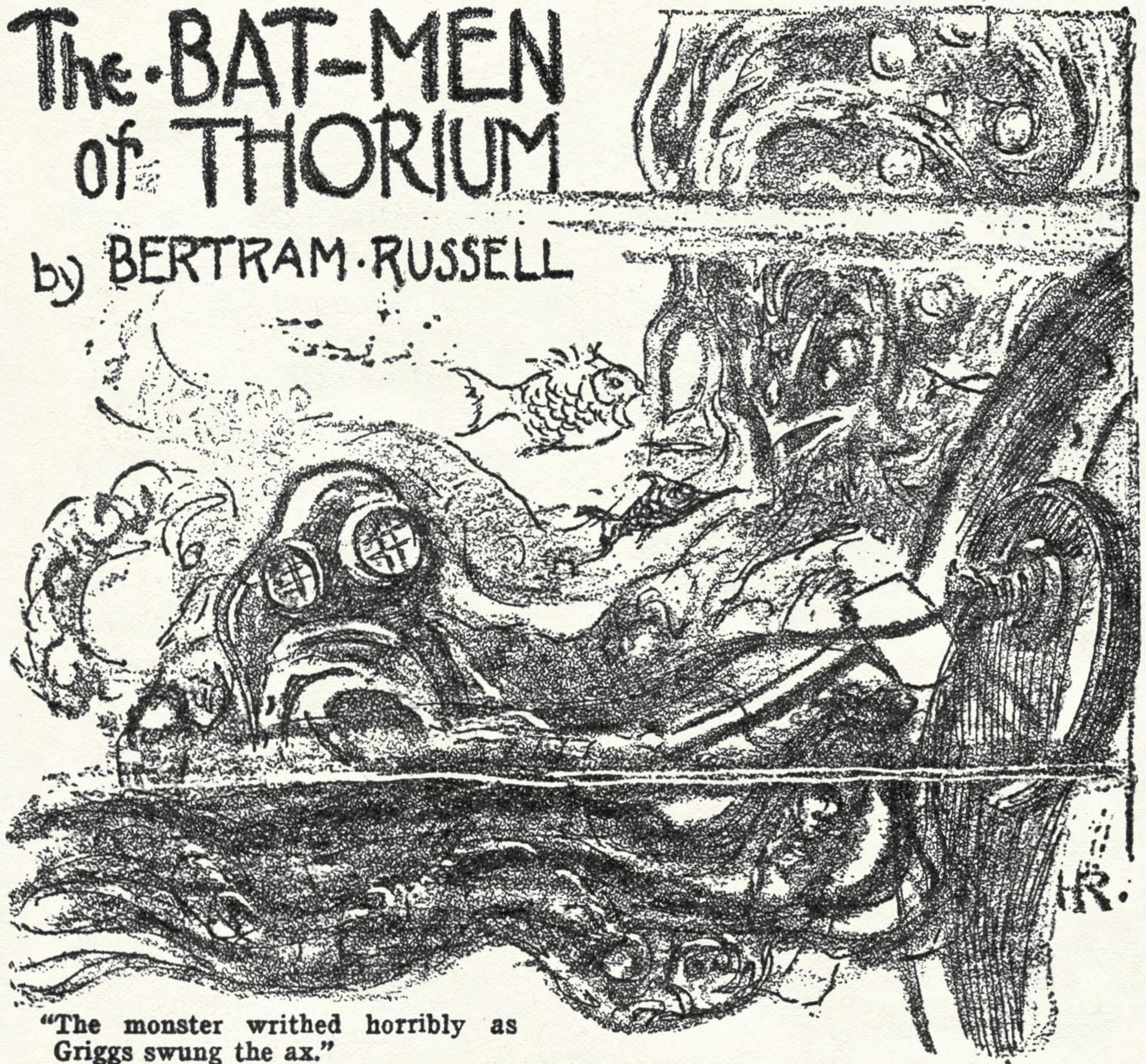


THE BAT-MEN OF THORIUM

by BERTRAM RUSSELL



"The monster writhed horribly as Griggs swung the ax."

THERE are those who, after reading this astounding history, will say: "It can not be." To them I reply: "It is." As I write this, the hot kisses of Thalia are still upon my lips; her form is still graven on my mind. Have we not produced for evidence hitherto unknown quantities of that wonderful mineral which we were still able to preserve when the final catastrophe overwhelmed Thorium? It sometimes seems to me that the mind of the great Diegon is reaching out to me from that far-away place, buried in a fourth dimension, where we were wont to discuss the mysteries of the universe that interested him so mightily. But, no! Diegon is dead. Did I not see him pass into the stupor of

death; was I not the one who folded the gossamer wings across his frail old body in the last act of reverence and love? Perchance Diegon still calls me from some other existence—of that I do not know, but my heart breaks when I think that I shall talk no more with that old man, who for centuries had fought nature, against almost unconquerable odds, and had finally been overwhelmed.

I had long known that Professor Perry had contemplated some such trip as the one he finally made, but that he had intended to include me in the expedition came as something of a shock. It might have been because I always sat open-mouthed, and listened to his every word when he made his weekly visit to my father,

to discuss the most recent theories and the latest advancements of scientific thought.

At least, he greatly surprized me one evening in July, when he said with a restrained excitement which I had never before seen him exhibit, "The craft is now complete; she was turned over to me by the shipyards today. I shall make my start next week. How would you like to take command of the expedition?"

I was thunderstruck. My slight experience during the World War had been in the United States navy, and I had even put in some time on submarines, but I had never had command of one, and I knew that the professor's craft was a submersible, and moreover a submersible of a very unusual type. I hardly knew how to answer his question. I burned as any young man would to go on this expedition, but I feared my knowledge was insufficient.

"She's very easy to handle, I am told," said the professor, understanding the cause of my indecision. "Suppose you take a run over to the shipyards tomorrow and inspect her. After that, you will know better whether you want to make the trip or not."

My father entered at this moment.

"So you're all ready, at last, eh?" he said as he shook the professor warmly by the hand. "Gee, but I'd like to go with you."

"What's to prevent you?" said the professor.

"I really can't leave my business. If I do, those Consolidated fellows will simply cut the ground from under my feet while I am away. Much as I'd like to accompany you, I'll have to pass it up. Where are you going to begin?"

The professor thought for a moment. "I believe I will set a course that will bring us in the Pacific Ocean somewhere about midway between the Samoa islands and the Hawaiian group. That region of the ocean has

been very carelessly explored at the surface, to say nothing of the regions below. I venture to say that we shall unearth—or rather unwater—a few surprises for the scientific world. They have found sharks, perfect in every way but only eight inches long, at great ocean depths. Why should there not be octopi as big as this house, or serpents a hundred yards in length? After all, if life originated in the sea, which it seems undoubtedly to have done, is it not rather more than probable that the great monsters of the deep, which are known to have existed, are still living unhampered at the bottom of the ocean? I hope also to bring up specimens of rare shellfish which live a hermit life on the ocean bed."

"But is it not too dark at the bottom of the ocean to see anything at all?" queried my father.

"Yes. Under ordinary conditions, it is quite impossible to see, even in the clearest water, after a descent of a few dozen feet. But I have provided against that by having powerful Klieg lights in specially prepared casings affixed to the shell of the submersible. These lights are controlled from the interior of the ship, and are capable of being projected in any direction and at any angle. I shall be able to illuminate the entire ocean in the vicinity of the ship, both above and below us, as well as all around. I have also equipped the boat with ultra-violet lighting, so that I can examine the denizens of the deep under its influence. It may be that they are in some way affected by its rays, as I have long suspected."

"I suppose there is no danger of your being crushed by the enormous pressures that exist at the bottom of the sea?" said my father.

The professor smiled. "No, indeed," he replied. "I have carefully calculated all the mechanics of the thing, and I have designed a craft which, not merely because of its great physical strength—I mean by that the

strength of the materials which are used in the construction of it, and the thickness of the hull—but also because of its unique shape, is able to withstand pressures of more than double those which it is calculated exist at the ocean floor. It has been claimed by some that it is impossible to construct a ship that will withstand the enormous pressures found there, and perhaps this is true if the strength of the materials used is alone taken into consideration, but we all know that there are shell-fish that inhabit the bed of the ocean, and their shells are capable of withstanding all known pressures. The fundamental principle of the submarine which I have devised is the same as that of the shell-fish. So I have no fears on that score—none whatever.”

“Have you made adequate provisions for your supply of air while submerged?”

“Yes. I have almost an air manufactory. I have a liquid air compressor, and an oxygen apparatus, which removes the oxygen from the carbon dioxide that is produced when we breathe. So, I have an almost infallible supply of fresh air. If all else fails, however, I have compressed oxygen in cylinders that will support life for twenty-four hours.”

“You have apparently forgotten nothing,” said my father admiringly.

“Wait till Ben has a look at the craft. He will tell us a dozen things lacking,” said the professor, turning to me. “By the way, here is a pass that will admit you aboard. Not everyone is allowed to inspect the ship, which is very closely guarded.”

He wrote a note, and signing it passed it across to me.

IT WAS with no slight degree of excitement that I stepped aboard the ship the following morning. Far from finding that he had omitted things, I was continually impressed with his foresight and knowledge. He seemed absolutely to have anticipated every-

thing. Of course, the submarine was radio-equipped, but when I looked into the tanks and laboratories that were to care for the specimens that we were to collect, I marveled. The ship itself was a great deal larger than any submarine I had hitherto seen, and the tanks it held could have accommodated a shoal of sharks without overcrowding. I noticed its odd shape. It was almost round. I discovered that it had more than one propeller. In fact, there was actually a screw projecting from the top part of the vessel. This, of course, was to enable the craft to rise, helicopter style. Glass windows of great strength and thickness but wonderful transparency were set in many different parts of the vessel. It would be possible to examine the surrounding water from all angles, and also from above.

The control room rather staggered me at first. It contained devices I had never seen before. Here were depth meters that registered miles below the surface, pressure meters that spoke in thousands of tons, a dozen different devices for submerging the craft, and as many more for raising her. Forward and aft propellers there were for steadying the ship in a current, and a multitude of devices the use of which I could not even guess. The quarters were elaborate. Electric lighting was installed throughout, and I could not imagine anything more, necessary for either the comfort or efficiency of the expedition.

The professor interrupted my examination. I heard him crossing the gangplank and descending the companionway. Clapping me on the shoulder, he said gleefully, “Well, do you feel like commanding her?”

I could only stammer my thanks at being allowed to take this task of such responsibility. I might even then have remained undecided had I not remembered that the professor himself had designed the ship, and must

therefore understand every part of its mechanism. He would always be near to advise me in case of need.

Thus it happened that I became master of the *Atlantis*, as we fancifully christened the craft in which we were going to search for lost continents at the bed of the ocean.

From then on, I was kept busy superintending the loading of the stores, fuel oil, scientific apparatus and the thousand and one things that have to be taken along on such an expedition.

One day I heard a voice in a strange dialect behind me as I stood on the dock watching a slingload of rifles going aboard.

"Strike me pink if that ain't the queerest-looking fish I ever seed. What yuh goin' to do with all them popguns, mister? I thought as 'ow the war was all done, and the 'Uns pretty busy payin' reparations. D'ye figure there's a few o' them *untersee* boats still around or something?"

I turned to look at my questioner. He was a little cockney, dressed in a blue wool sweater, and was lounging against the gangplank with a dirty clay pipe in his mouth. It came to me that I should need an old hand in the crew, and I thought I spotted a sturdy seafarer here. I explained that the rifles were to enable us to capture certain denizens of the deep which we hoped to bring back with us. I told him there was even a mitrailleuse installed in the vessel which was capable of firing through the hull of the ship, and into the water.

"Now yuh don't say so? Well, I'll be blowed. I served in 'is Majesty's submarines, but swelp me bob, this 'ere fish 'as 'em all skinned. Maybe yuh wants another man, Captain?" he said, producing a handful of dirty discharges, and Board of Trade books.

"So you're an A. B.?"

"Yus. And if yuh want a good 'elmsman or Q. M. there ain't none better than Bill Griggs, though I does say it myself as shouldn't. There ain't no better brarse polisher on the

western ocean than me, and that's a fact. No, nor the eastern or the southern—or in Davey Jones's locker."

"There may be some element of chance connected with this trip," I said cautiously.

"Charnce—that's me middle nime. Bill Charnce Griggs. I thrives on adventure. Say, 'ow abaht it, mister? Is it a go?"

"Yes," I smiled. "It's a go."

At length the ship was ready for sea, and the final farewells were said. As I took the wheel, and piloted her outside the heads, I could not help wondering how the voyage would end. Could I have foreseen what its termination would be, and the adventures which we were destined to go through, would I have gone? I wonder.

THE vessel answered every demand I made upon her with clocklike precision. Never had I known a craft to handle more easily. For days we glided along with that swift undulatory motion characteristic of the submersible, through brightly gleaming waters, the gay-colored fishes darting away at every turn of the screw. Several times we stopped to collect specimens of some new species which the professor wanted for our collection. Two of the starboard tanks were full of these denizens of the deep.

Griggs proved himself all that he had said: a conscientious and efficient helmsman, and a good seaman. I was the more surprized, therefore, one day to be awakened by being thrown out of my bunk. When I had recovered from the rather severe bump which my head had received, I saw that something was violently wrong. The vessel was no longer on an even keel. In fact, she was apparently heading nose foremost for the bottom. Scrambling as best I could to the chart room and pilot house, I found things in a state of chaos. Griggs was hanging on to the wheel, trying to steady the ship; the professor lay on the floor, or rather on one of the walls, for the sub-

marine was still in a perpendicular position. Instruments rolled from side to side, and the vessel was apparently uncontrollable.

"She won't answer the bloomin' 'elm, sir," shouted Griggs as I entered. This was very apparent. Quickly I inspected everything, but nowhere could I discover anything amiss. The depth meter showed the craft to be descending at a terrific speed. If something were not soon done to stop this awful fall, we should be smashed to pieces by hitting the bottom. The ballast tanks were empty, and I was at a loss to understand the cause of the trouble. The ship began now to spiral around, corkscrew fashion, and we were all becoming very dizzy.

The professor grabbed at me from his recumbent position. Drawing me down so that my ear was close over his mouth, he spoke.

"Start the gyroscope, or we'll all die of vertigo," he said.

I realized the sense of this precaution, and moving to the controls I started up the huge rotors, of which there were two. Straining in every plate and bolt, as though resisting some terrific unseen force, the submersible gradually assumed the horizontal position once more, and we were able to stand erect. The depth meters still showed the ship to be descending at an increasing speed.

"I never saw no ship dive like this before," said Griggs hoarsely. "Looks like we're all headed straight for Davey Jones's locker, and no mistake."

"Don't talk, but reverse the engines," I shouted, and he reversed the controls, but except for a slight shivering, the motion of the craft was not appreciably altered. I tried to set the elevating blades to bring us to the surface, but the ship stubbornly refused to obey any other force than that which was relentlessly dragging her to the bottom. Everything seemed to be in order, but still she continued

to dive, more and more every minute. We were now fourteen thousand feet below the surface, and dropping fast.

The professor was perplexed. We started the Klieg lights, and by their light saw fish and weed flying past us in great numbers. But always their course seemed to be upward; in other words, there was no denying that we were actually descending.

"The only thing that I can say is that we're caught in some hidden maelstrom, some unknown vortex that is sucking us down—God knows where," said the professor in troubled accents. "If we could only get out of it, there is a possibility that we should be all right, but as long as the *Atlantis* refuses to answer her helm we're utterly helpless."

Undoubtedly he had hit on the truth, and I was forced to agree with him. We could only stand still and wait for the worst, trying the various controls at odd moments in hopes that the ship would respond.

After several minutes of this headlong descent, the controls indicated that we were not falling so rapidly, and we seemed to be going in a more slantwise direction than before. The gyroscopes were still necessary, however, to maintain our equilibrium. At length, our progress became almost horizontal, and the falling ceased. Whether we were on the bottom of the ocean, we could not tell. We therefore started the searchlights once more, and were very careful to examine the water beneath us. Several times I thought I saw the bed of the ocean below us, in the powerful searchlights, but I could not be wholly sure. After some minutes of this progress, the ship stopped, with a thud which threw us all to the deck.

"Gor' blimey — we've struck!" groaned Griggs, making frantic efforts to work the controls. "It's good-night now, for all of us."

Plainly, our progress had been arrested. The screws whirled uselessly, and our elevators refused to work.

The lights showed us that we were resting on a rocky floor. Undoubtedly we were at the bottom of the ocean. Fish swirled wildly past us on all sides, as though drawn by some powerful current, probably by the maelstrom which had sucked us down. But why were we stationary? Why were we not rushing along in the current?

Griggs supplied the answer. Suddenly he pointed a trembling finger at the port light. "Look there," he said, "just look there, and tell me what you see."

Together, the professor and I looked, and recoiled in horror.

What we saw was in effect a disk, about ten inches across, of super-scribed rings. These rings were all composed of quivering flesh. They lay flat against the glass of the window. With one accord we drew back. It was the sucker of what must in effect have been a very leviathan among octopi. If one single sucker on a tentacle were ten inches in diameter, we could only guess at the length of the tentacle itself, and by inference the actual size of the octopus.

WE CLIMBED to the conning-tower, and from the windows we saw a sight that chilled us to the marrow. Two enormous tentacles of the octopus were coiled around the hull of the ship, seeming to stretch away out of range of the powerful lights. But, from time to time, I caught the reflection of the searchlights in the eyes of the brute. I shudder even now, when I think of those eyes. Their baleful glare was fixed unblinkingly upon us and they must have measured a foot across. Slowly they seemed to be advancing upon us, but that might have been only an effect of the imagination. The ship began to shudder, as the monster tried to draw us into its gorge. If we did not do something in a hurry, we were doomed.

"We've got to hack them legs off, sir," said Griggs. "It's a ticklish job,

but if you've got an armored diving-suit, I'll go out and try my luck."

The brave fellow stood ready.

"But, the pressure will crush you to jelly," I said.

"It won't no more crush me than that big squid there," said Griggs.

"By George, that's right," put in the professor. "What's an octopus doing at these depths, anyway? I can't understand it. But certainly, if it is not crushed, Griggs with a steel suit on would not be."

"Better let me try it, sir," said Griggs again.

I opened the locker where the suits were kept, and rapidly we assisted Griggs in donning the suit. Before we adjusted the helmet, he shook hands with both of us, and then, with the ax in his hands, he stepped through the exit chamber into the water. We saw him climb upon the deck. He lifted the ax, and swung it. We could barely feel the thuds of the blows as he hacked at the leathery tissue of the monster. Evidently it was not used to this sort of treatment, for it writhed horribly as the tentacle was hewn in two. Griggs was almost hidden in a cloud of red fluid which now surrounded him. Still, by the blows, we could feel that he was freeing us. He had evidently chopped one of the tentacles in two, for we saw him cross the ship and advance upon the other. The blows commenced again. We watched breathlessly. Griggs was almost through the last remaining arm, when the monster, evidently tired of its passive part, began to advance upon us. Slowly, evilly, the great eyes loomed nearer. I trembled for the brave fellow working desperately to save our lives. He had evidently seen the impending peril, for he worked frantically at the few remaining sinews. The craft was beginning to move once more. The meters showed we were gliding along again in a horizontal direction. Griggs had severed the arm, and with a great bound, we started

forward again. He almost lost his balance at the unexpected motion, and I saw him staggering across the top of the submarine, grasping wildly at everything that offered him a hold. I noticed also that he was ducking his head at frequent intervals, as though to avoid something that threatened him from above. At last he had the door open, and after a few seconds was back again in the pilot house with us. Speedily we removed the diving-suit, and saw a pale, haggard Griggs.

"Got any brandy?" he gasped.

He drained the proffered glass at a gulp, and sank onto the settee. After a few seconds, he looked at us.

"It's 'orrible," he said.

"What is?" we asked together breathlessly.

"Why—this. We're under the earth, and under the sea, at the same time," said Griggs.

We looked at each other in bewilderment. Had the experience turned his head? It certainly looked like it. Griggs saw the look, and understood.

"Oh—I'm all right now," he said. "I tell you we're under the earth. There's a wall of rock all around the ship. Look out and see for yourself, if you think I'm crazy. I had to duck my head a dozen times to dodge the rocks above us."

We wasted no time in returning to the port lights. The glare of the searchlights showed us that Griggs was right. On each side, and above and below, there was a sheer wall of rock, that rushed past at a mad speed.

"This must be some tunnel at the bottom of the sea—perhaps a volcanic tube," said the professor after he had studied the formation for a while.

"Then, that would account for the low pressure, and the presence of the octopus," I added. "Surrounded by this protecting wall of rock, it was not subjected to the terrific pressure of the ocean above. He has evidently anchored himself there, in a place where he does not have to hunt for his food, but has it brought to him by the

current. Those fish are sucked into his mouth, so to speak."

"You must be right," answered the professor. "But what will happen to us?"

"We just have to wait and see what happens. Either we shall hit something and all be drowned, or we shall get out of this current after a while. We can't stay in it forever."

So we stood around, idle, looking at one another's pale faces, in a tension of suspense, wondering what would happen next. We were prepared for almost any marvel, but not quite for the one which actually happened.

We were carried along by the current, at a vast speed, for an hour or more, each minute fearing that we should strike one of the projecting spurs that surrounded us on all sides. But the current was so powerful that we seemed to keep well to the middle of the tunnel.

At length we experienced a violent twisting and leaping, after which the boat lay motionless.

"Well, that's over, anyway. But where are we now?" said the professor.

The searchlight now failed to help us. All around was dense blackness, a thick and inky body of water, which began as soon as our lights faded away. No movement of any kind was apparent. A look at the depth gage, however, told a different story. We were slowly rising. After ascending for about fifty feet, we stopped again. The searchlights revealed to us an astounding fact. We were at the surface. Indubitably we lay at rest on the surface of a motionless body of water. We could see it rippling around the submarine as she gently floated at rest. But all around was an inky darkness—impenetrable, such as I had never before seen.

"Well, we're not much better off than before," I remarked. "I'm going outside. Help me with the diving-suit, you fellows."

I DONNED the suit, and taking a box of matches in a water-tight case, stepped through the exit tanks onto the deck of the ship. I took the packet of matches and carefully removed the box. Gingerly I extracted a match from the box, and struck it. It sputtered, and to my astonishment, burst into flame, burning brilliantly to the end. If there was flame, there must be air. I re-entered the ship, and as soon as my suit was removed, told the others of my experiment with the matches. But they had seen it already, and the professor agreed with me that there must be air or oxygen outside, and it would probably be safe to go on deck.

Cautiously, therefore, we opened the hatch on deck, and sniffed at the air. It was pure and fresh. Although this was what we had expected, we could not help looking at one another in astonishment. To find pure fresh air five miles below the level of the sea was indeed a strange thing.

"I can't explain this darkness," began the professor, and stopped, awed at the hollowness with which his voice re-echoed.

"Did you notice how strange that sounded?" he began again. "It would almost seem that we are in a great cavern, and yet it can hardly be that, for I see no walls, or roof. Yet, this darkness is puzzling. How do we come to find this still lake at the bottom of the ocean? I confess——"

"Didn't I tell you we're under the earth and under the sea too?" interrupted Griggs eagerly.

"What do you mean?" I asked, puzzled.

"Why—don't you see? We reached the bottom of the Pacific, didn't we? We got swept into a tunnel, didn't we? Well, then—where was we going when we was travelin' through that tunnel? Don't you see?"

"No. I don't," I replied.

"Wait a minute—I think I do," said the professor. "You mean?—of course you must be right! Why

didn't I think of it before? Griggs is right," he repeated, turning to me. "We are inside the earth now. We are in a place where man has never dreamed of exploring—we have penetrated the earth's crust, and are now beneath it."

I was dumfounded as this startling truth became more clear to me every second. I understood it all; that is, all except the pure air which we found here. That was a puzzle. There could be no atmosphere down here, yet the air was the same, or very similar to that which we breathed at the surface. I found my mind whirling in all sorts of contradictions about forces. Were we supported here by gravity, or by centrifugal force? Were we lying on the outer or inner edge of this space which surrounded us? I understood the complete darkness. No daylight could penetrate here. We should have to adjust all our ideas of day and night. There would be no more sun, moon, and stars for us if we stayed here. But could we stay here? What were we to live on after our scanty supply of food was exhausted? Surely there could not be life or vegetation in this funereal place! The outlook seemed gloomy at the best. We should doubtless perish here of starvation. Our lighting system would fail us in a few hours; in fact, it was already beginning to dim, under the terrific strain which we had imposed upon it. After that would be darkness and starvation—a very dismal prospect.

Evidently some such thoughts had occupied the minds of my companions, for the professor spoke sharply.

"Well—standing mooning here won't do any good. We must get the motors running again, and try to learn all we can about this place, before our lights fail us."

There was no gainsaying the practicality of his reply, and we therefore filed down inside the ship again. After starting the motors, Griggs took the helm under my instructions, and

we very carefully cruised ahead at slow speed. The compass seemed still to respond to some magnetic attraction—probably the same one which had influenced it at the surface—and I noted the course to be approximately west north west.

We extinguished our searchlights, intending to reserve them only for cases of emergency, and cruised along in the inky darkness. There is no such darkness to be found on earth's crust, except in the darkest depths of our mines. There had never been any light here; consequently there was not even that faint phosphorescence or radiation which can be seen on earth in even the darkest places. Here the blackness was absolute. Strain our eyes as we would, though we knew it was hopeless, we could not pierce the gloom. The silence, too, was absolute. No faintest breath of air, no ripple of wave or song of bird here to break the monotony! It was apparently a place where Death reigned supreme and unchallenged.

We had even extinguished the lights inside the ship, to conserve our power, and stood around in the chart room, in a very panic of apprehension. The retina of my eye, still excited by the glare of the searchlights, began to play me strange tricks. I saw blinding circles of light, which darted around, no matter in which direction I turned my pupils. I know it was only a reflex nervous action, but still it disconcerted me greatly. After some little time, even these visions disappeared, and I saw nothing but that dense night, a darkness which I could almost *feel*.

How long we proceeded thus, I can not say. Undoubtedly it seemed a much longer time than it actually was, but I should estimate that it was not less than ninety minutes. In this the professor agrees with me, though Griggs says it was more nearly three hours. At all events, I was beginning to notice a strange difference

in our surroundings. I could hardly explain it, but it was very definite. I feared to mention it, thinking perhaps my wits were playing me false, and so I waited a sign from my companions.

It was not long in coming. I felt a tug at my arm, and heard the professor's voice at my ear.

"Am I dreaming, or do you see what I see?" he whispered in awe.

"I see it also," I said. "Light—but light of a kind I have never before met with anywhere."

"Not daylight at least—of that I am positive," said the professor.

"More like moonlight, says I," added Griggs.

He was correct. It was a very faint luminous glow, like the rays from a pale moon on a misty night, with one exception. The rays were not blue, but green in color—a ghastly green that made our faces look like demon masks, and changed every smile into a snarl.

The professor was absorbed in speculations as to the nature of the light, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion. I was busily engaged in searching the—I nearly said "sky"—regions aloft, for some signs of stars or moon, when I was interrupted by a shout from Griggs.

"Land on the port bow, sir!" he cried, at the same time spinning the wheel hard over.

Reducing the motors to half speed, we cruised carefully along the border of this land—*island*, or whatever it was. The pale light seemed to be increasing, but whether it was some sort of dawn, or whether merely because we were approaching nearer to the source of light, I did not know.

Taking the binoculars, I carefully focused them on the land, now skimming past us slowly. I could not repress a gasp of admiration. The sight which met my eyes was one of stupendous beauty. Rising from the banks was a mighty forest. Colossal trees lost their tops in the upper air, and

their foliage was of a kind such as I had never seen anywhere before. The nearest thing I could think of was a forest in the middle of winter—entirely blanketed with a heavy fall of snow. The leaves, if such they can be called, were like puffs of cotton wool. Their shapes were as many as the imagination could conjure up. In another respect, also, this huge subterranean forest resembled an earth-forest in winter: the trees were all white—absolutely white. There was not a tree of color to be found anywhere, except that faint greenish tinge by which everything was illuminated.

“White flora! . . . ah, yes, of course . . . no daylight, without which no flora can be green. A forest in the bowels of the earth . . . marvelous, quite marvelous! I must certainly get some specimens of this. It will electrify the scientific world. . . .”

“ ‘Ave yuh figgered some way of gettin’ back to the world, then, perfosor?’ said Griggs, eagerly.

The professor was recalled from his scientific speculations.

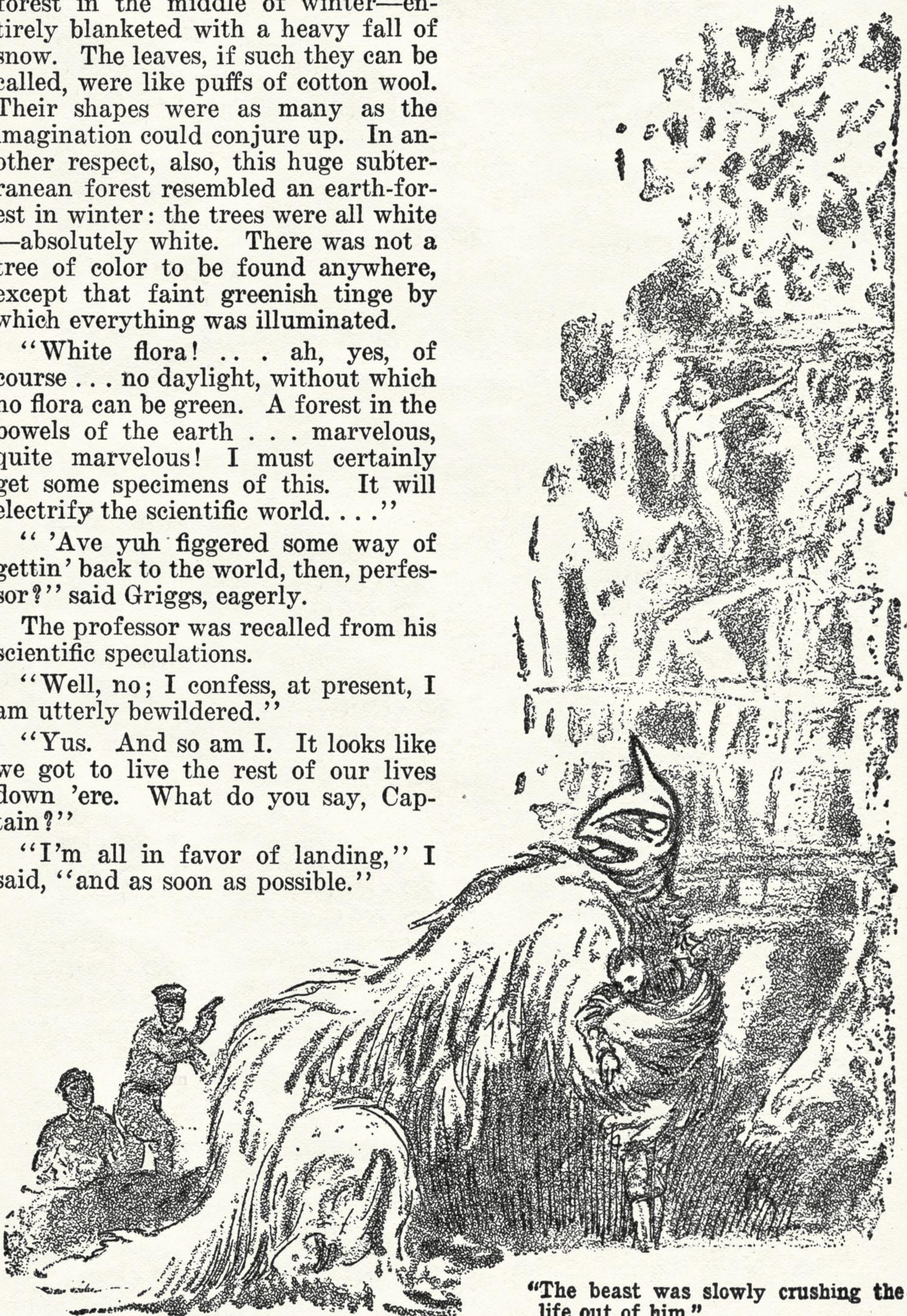
“Well, no; I confess, at present, I am utterly bewildered.”

“Yus. And so am I. It looks like we got to live the rest of our lives down ‘ere. What do you say, Captain?”

“I’m all in favor of landing,” I said, “and as soon as possible.”

“I’m with you, sir. Let’s look for a likely place.”

After a few minutes more of cruis-



“The beast was slowly crushing the life out of him.”

ing, we came upon a cove, where a sloping beach offered some possibilities of a landing. We ran the nose of the ship against the soft sand of the beach, and opening the hatch, prepared to explore the shore.

The professor went first, and we followed. Our progress was made in complete silence, and we were approaching the edge of the forest when the professor, who in his eagerness to inspect the new flora had advanced more quickly than we, gave a shriek. Running quickly to his side, we found him in a horrible predicament. Some great ugly white monster had him in two long hairy arms, and was slowly crushing the life out of him. Not a sound came from the beast; the silence was broken only by the professor's cries for help.

"Better try a bullet on him, sir," said Griggs.

I had thought to strap my automatic about me when we left the submarine, and now drew the gun. The great bulk of the brute was facing sideways, and I had a fair chance to shoot at it, without hitting the professor. Taking a careful aim, I fired.

The shot rang out hollowly, and the enormous brute sank to the ground, dead, releasing the professor as it died. I marveled that a single shot from an automatic could kill so mighty a beast, but there was no time to reason the thing out, for a dozen of its mates came bounding through the undergrowth, and chased by this flock of white monsters, we fled to the ship.

As we ran, I heard the flapping of wings about us, and saw many forms flying over our heads, keeping pace with us. These were white also, and flew with a gently heaving motion, almost silently. In fact the whole episode had been compassed in silence. There had been no rending or snarling, no groans when the brute died—only the professor's shrieks, and the report from my auto-

matic. Hastily scrambling aboard the ship again, we clapped the hatch down, and, starting the motors, backed away from the land.

"Phew—I always 'eard as 'ow 'ell was under the hearth—this must be it. I believe we're all dead, and bein' tortured for our sins up on the hearth there. Gor' blimey—I 'opes we don't meet the Old Man, now," groaned Griggs.

I could not help smiling at his comical notions, serious though our predicament was. We continued to cruise slowly along the coast, the flying creatures keeping exact pace with us as we did so. The flapping of their wings prevented our getting a good look at them, but their every movement was one of grace as they sailed serenely above us. Every time we changed our course, these creatures did the same. They were evidently bent upon following us.

The professor had been examining them with the greatest curiosity. He uttered a startling exclamation:

"Good heavens! My word! Another branch of the *genus homo*...."

"A branch of the what?" I interrupted smilingly.

"The *genus homo*—man. They are men—real live men—but of a kind unknown at the earth's surface. See—take a look," and he handed me the glasses. "They resemble in all respects but one the man of the surface. The only difference is their wings."

I looked, and could not dispute this statement. Here was a race of men with wings, which seemed to be composed of a tissue attached to the arms, and were in some cases as much as ten feet across. The wings were almost transparent, and of a gauzy, gossamerlike texture—much like the wings of the dragon-fly. The faces of these creatures were all of singular beauty, and they showed a high degree of intelligence.

But our attention was diverted from the creatures—the bat-men, as Griggs called them—to the land. The

forest was rapidly thinning, and after a short time it gave way to a sandy plain which stretched away for a great distance. The light became still brighter as we proceeded, and we could distinguish everything with great distinctness.

"We might as well increase the speed as long as the light continues," I said, and the submarine darted forward at full speed.

She was able to travel on the surface at a speed of some forty miles an hour, but the bat-men seemed to have no difficulty in keeping up with us. Without apparent exertion, they sailed along above our heads.

"Look—they're going, now," said Griggs, and as we looked we saw them fly off at a great speed ahead of us.

"Gone to tell their friends, I suppose," I said jestingly.

Rapidly the contours of the land changed. The rank vegetation disappeared, and carefully cultivated fields lined the water's edge. The plants were quite different from any we had seen before, however. We noticed scores of the batlike creatures at work in the fields, who flew aloft when they saw us, and sailed with us as the others had done. Our progress was marked by an ever-increasing army of them; soon they numbered hundreds, all flying aloft in complete silence.

We were now approaching what looked like a city, though in few ways resembling the cities of the surface. The buildings had no roofs, probably because there was never any rain here, and the walls seemed to be rather divisions that separated the property of one from another than for any other purpose—that of protection from the elements, for instance.

As we approached the city, we slowed down to a mere crawl, and at this, many of the bat-men began to march along the shores, keeping pace with us. Still others were flying overhead. Slowly, ever slowly, we nosed our way in to the shore and to the

beautiful white city. In silence, the bat-men edged away from our ship, and, as we opened the hatch on to the deck, and stepped out with revolvers in our hands, they eased back, as though uncertain how to act. Plainly, they had never seen anything like us before. They made no attempt to do us harm, however, and we therefore carefully ran the submarine ashore, and stepped out.

This was the signal for them to close in and circle around us, examining our features and clothing with minutest care. It was an uncanny sight, those beautiful white figures, with their gossamer wings folded about them, stroking the clothing we wore, peering into our eyes, and examining us generally. Thus it was that we came to Thorium.

WHILE we were standing thus, not knowing what to do, or how to act, we saw a shuffling taking place at the outskirts of the circle. The creatures parted, to make way for someone, evidently an important personage, who came slowly to us, borne on some sort of litter, which was carried by eight of the bat-men. As the equipage came closer, we saw a venerable man, with a flowing white beard that stretched to his waist, who sat within. His wings were folded about him, and he turned to right and to left as he passed the white creatures who stood motionless and evidently in great adoration. With his lips he appeared to be blessing them, though we heard no sound. At length the litter came before us, and the bearers stopped, setting it upon the ground. Aided by one of the bearers, the old man descended, and stood before us.

I had never seen such a face. It seemed to contain all the love, intelligence and wisdom of all time. Something of this must have struck the professor also, for he remarked to himself: "God bless my soul—what an intellect!"

I had barely heard the remark, but my astonishment was profound when the old man before us shook his head very slowly, while a smile of great beauty illumined his features.

"I believe he heard what you said, and understood you," I said in a whisper.

This time I was sure he had understood, for he nodded eagerly to me, and continued to smile in an encouraging way.

"Will wonders never cease?" muttered the professor in complete bewilderment. "A race of creatures at the center of the earth—bat-men, indeed—who understand the American tongue. Marvelous, simply marvelous!"

At this, the old man seemed puzzled. He knit his brows in wonder, and the smile faded away. Plainly he was at a loss to comprehend the professor's meaning.

"Speak to him," I said.

The professor turned quickly to him.

"I trust you will pardon my ill manners, sir," he began, at which the smile again lit up the old man's features, and he plainly indicated his acquiescence. "Am I to believe that you are able to understand a language which you can not possibly have heard before, when, if I am to take the evidence of my senses, you do not use vocal methods of conversation at all?"

The old man nodded again, vigorously, and made some movement with his mouth, but we heard no sound. I felt as sure, as though I had heard him articulate the words, however, that he meant us to understand that this was so. He had fixed the professor with his piercing eyes. They seemed to bore through him like fire. Under his glance, the professor was visibly moved. He turned to me.

"He wants to know where we have come from, I think," he said. "I could almost hear the words issue from his mouth."

"I felt the same question also," I answered.

Catching the eye of the old man, I saw that he was again nodding to us.

The professor turned to him again.

"As far as we are able to guess, we have penetrated the earth's crust, and are now inside the globe. You, of course, will not understand this who have never been outside, but for the present, it must suffice if I tell you that you are, as I believe, now living inside of a great globe, which we call Earth. This globe is spinning through infinite space—something else which will puzzle you. But of these we will speak later; at the moment we are particularly interested in knowing if you have a source of food supply here in the bowels of the earth. It is necessary that we who live at the surface eat at frequent intervals; we sincerely hope that you are bound by the same necessity. Is this so?"

I had been watching the old man's face as the professor spoke. I could see that he had understood much of the other's speech, but he had evidently been puzzled at the mention of a globe spinning in space. He had now fixed us with those magnetic eyes of his, and we received the impression that we were to follow him. The eight bearers now took up the litter once more; and preceded by the old man, and followed by the crowd of bat-men, we walked slowly over the sandy soil in the direction of the city.

Everything was strange to us—the white fields, looking as though a heavy fall of snow had covered them, that stretched away into the distance, the fantastic green illumination that seemed to come out of nowhere, the darkness overhead—all was new to us. The strange thing is that we did not find the continuous whiteness annoying, or monotonous. It was relieved by the multiform contour of the vegetation. It seemed that no two trees, shrubs, or bushes were of the same species. The march was therefore frequently interrupted by the professor,

who stopped to examine each startling variation from the general range.

At length we came to the city—a city without roofs.

“How different from our earth cities, with their glaring signboards advertising the newest in penny candies, or the popular drink of the day,” I thought.

No rattle of street cars here, no shouting venders who tried to sell you what you didn’t want! There were what looked like stores. The shopkeepers reclined upon couches in the midst of their wares, which lay about them on the ground. Objects of the most curious nature, these were. They seemed to be mostly art objects; at least they were of great beauty, as was in fact everything in this underground metropolis.

It was here that we saw the first touches of color. Drapes of some filmy material, probably woven from the fiber of the strange trees we had seen, were colored in vivid hues—not the colors of earth, however, but the most gorgeous reds and violets.

The professor interrupted my thoughts at this juncture with an exclamation: “Can it be possible that these people have mastered the art of making the infra-red and ultra-violet bands of the spectrum visible? It would almost seem that this is so, for I have never before seen such colors. They look like reds and violets, but they are not.”

The old man turned in his litter at the professor’s words, but he was completely mystified. Of course, he could not comprehend the nature of light, who had never seen any real light.

“I must make a note to explain to him the spectrum and its component colors,” said the professor, writing on his cuff with a stubby pencil that he always carried for such notes as his absent-minded brain might forget.

The old man seemed pleased at this, and nodded a smiling acquiescence.

AT LENGTH we entered one of the buildings, by passing under a magnificent archway into a huge court. The walls and floor seemed to be of a brightly polished marble, and here also was a variety of color to which our eyes were quite unaccustomed. Through corridor after corridor, lined with the bat-men, who stood with bowed heads, much as our servants do on the earth’s crust, we proceeded, and halted at last in a spacious hall, whose walls seemed to radiate some sort of iridescence, whose lofty columns lost themselves in the darkness above. Magnificent drapes hung from the cornices, thick carpets of the most wondrous designs lay on the floor. The litter was carried to a sort of dais which stood upon several flat steps.

The old man alighted, and seated himself upon this chair. He seemed to say to us: “Be at ease—seat yourselves.”

We therefore squatted upon the steps around the dais, watching the old man.

Without apparently any command having been given, three servants came from one of the corridors giving upon the great hall. They advanced to the old man, and stood with bowed heads. He seemed to be talking to them, although we heard no word. With a gesture he indicated the three of us squatting at his feet, and in full understanding the three bat-men glided away. Soon they returned with goblets made of a beautiful substance greatly resembling alabaster.

We took one each, and the old man took one. He descended from the dais, and wrapping his gauzy wings about the three of us, he seemed to be blessing us, after which he took up the goblet, and indicating to us to do the same, he drained it at a gulp.

I found the liquid of a strangely piquant taste. It ran like fire through my veins, though I could have sworn there was no alcohol in it. I found

myself with a sharp appetite, evidently the effects of the drink.

The professor had been regarding the old man with a fixed gaze.

"Have you adopted a system of names in your region?" he asked.

The old man nodded in delight, and I felt him to be saying, "Yes. I am called Dagon."

"Did you get the impression of Diegon?" said the professor, turning to me.

"I thought he meant Dagon," I answered.

"Seemed to me more like a swear-word I used to know on earth, years ago," chimed in Griggs.

The old man was partly puzzled by the last speaker. He looked at us again.

"Diegon—is it?" asked the professor, looking at the old man.

He showed by his manner that this was plainly so. He was evidently pleased at the ease with which we understood his telepathic speech.

From this point on, it must be understood that any conversations which I chronicle as having taken place between the dwellers of this region and ourselves were telepathic conversations—that is to say, there was no vocal response on their part. In fact, we soon became tired of using our voices, when we found that they understood our thoughts equally well, and we used vocal methods only in speaking among ourselves; for although we were able to read the thoughts of Diegon and some others down here, we could not understand each other without words. Of course, the answer to this is that Diegon had so perfected his telepathic powers that he could make us understand the powerful radiations from his brain, and could greatly amplify the feeble radiations from our minds, thus making communication possible. After some practise, however, we were actually able to communicate among ourselves by this method, a great ad-

vantage when we were talking to Diegon, as we were thus able to understand the drift of any conversation which though unspoken became general. It is interesting to note that we did not always receive the same impression. This is exemplified in the understanding of the old man's name, where I received the impression of "Dagon" and Griggs that of "Doggone."

"I am much interested in the singular beauty of everything in your region," said the professor. "Particularly the faces and forms of your subjects. On earth we have many who are of great hideousness, both of mind and body. I suppose you have achieved this by a long-continued evolution?"

"Evolution?" queried Diegon.

"I mean that as different generations have sprung up, each has been more nearly perfect, until you have now developed a perfect race."

"I do not understand your meaning."

"Let me illustrate for you with an example from the earth-crust life. Centuries ago—you must understand that we up there measure time by means of the sun, which I will explain to you later—we were all savages, who killed each other for food, and were in fact little better than those animals which attacked us on our first arrival in your country."

"Those are the Ottars, who protect us against our enemies," interrupted Diegon.

"Well, we were little better than the Ottars, but we became superior at each new generation, or through each century, and now are, as we say, civilized, though whether our civilization is more nearly perfect than yours, I can not yet say."

"I do not understand all that you say, but the principal ideas are clear to me," said Diegon, as the food was served to us. "You evidently have not yet reached the stage where you

can overcome the processes of decay and death."

"No, indeed," said the professor.

"We have. Now I myself, for instance, have lived for three"—he held up three fingers—"for three Jopals. You will not understand the meaning of Jopals, probably. It represents our time standard. A Jopal is the time taken for this to disintegrate, and return to base metal."

He took from behind him a beautifully colored box of the same alabasterlike material as the goblets from which we had drunk. Removing the lid, he handed it to the professor for examination. He seemed to know instinctively that his more abstruse ideas would be more quickly apprehended by him than by us. The professor examined the tiny fragment of whatever lay within.

"Radium," he exclaimed. "They base their time on the disintegration of the radium atom, and its return to lead. My goodness! that is millions of years!"

"That is the way we measure time, however," said Diegon. "See—here are two expired periods." He produced two of the caskets, which contained tiny particles of a dark metal—undoubtedly lead. "We measure our smaller time periods in terms of the rate of emanation of certain standard radium samples. You see our method is quite as accurate, and more simple than yours, which involves calculations about other worlds and suns, of which I learn from the professor."

WE HAD been eating the meal while engaged in this conversation, and found the strange food exquisite. It consisted chiefly of the white vegetation which we had seen on our arrival, though there were also many fruits, also white, each of which had a different flavor. Most startling of all, perhaps, were the varieties of shell-fish, and some pieces of the tenderest flesh, which

like everything else were served uncooked, though treated in some way so that they did not taste raw.

Diegon resumed: "I was about to tell you that we have learned the secrets of life and death. My parents were among the last to die. Now, we are able to prolong our lives indefinitely. We have long ceased to bring new children into existence, for there are already as many as our scant food supply will support. We now live at peace with one another, some, like myself, for instance, engaged in the continual search for new knowledge, and given the charge of those who are unfitted to govern themselves; for you will understand that we are not all of equal intelligence or wisdom. Some of my subjects are only two Jopals old—they have not yet acquired the knowledge which will be theirs in time. Others are engaged in preparing our food-stuffs; others are the creators of music; still others prepare our decorative pieces, and so on. There is no overlapping, and our existence would be one of complete tranquillity, were it not for the Zoags."

"Who are the Zoags?" we asked.

"You will learn soon enough," sighed Diegon, while his face saddened. "They are our enemies. They hate us for our superiority. We do not hate them: we only pity them. They seize every opportunity to harass us. But two Opals since, they carried off Thalia, my beloved daughter, and now hold her a hostage against our submission to them. Much as I love her, though, I will never betray my people by giving in. I have a plan to recover her, of which I will tell you later. It may be that you would care to join me."

"By all means," we said.

"And now, you are doubtless fatigued, and would like to rest."

Again, as if from nowhere, came several attendants, and we knew that we should follow them. Rising,

therefore, and saluting Diegon, we walked slowly from the great hall.

Our silent guides led us through a maze of twisting passages that wound about the palace. On every hand were objects of great beauty. Here and there a servant paused in his task to observe with eyes full of curiosity the three strangely clothed beings without wings who were being conducted through the halls.

At last we emerged from the walls of the palace, and found ourselves in what might be termed a park. At least it showed signs of having been treated artificially. The terraces were too regular, the trees too symmetrical, to be otherwise. Our silent leader conducted us beneath trees, whose woolly foliage swept our cheeks as we marched in single file behind him. At last we found a small house that nestled against a hillside, where a sparkling brook frolicked its way to the great lake which apparently bounded Thorium on all sides.

We entered the house, which had been recently prepared for our coming, and with a silent salute our conductor withdrew. We seated ourselves on some couches which had been provided, and looked at each other. For the first time we were able to sit together alone, in comparative security, and discuss our plight. We were, I think, by this time quite accustomed to the strange green light under which everything seemed so weird and uncanny. Yet I could not restrain a smile as I looked at the faithful Griggs, whose wobegone features and rueful frown looked really laughable under the ghostly luminance.

The professor spoke the thoughts of all of us when he said: "How the deuce are we going to get out of this place? The people seem very kindly disposed toward us, and there is apparently no immediate prospect of our starving; yet I confess that I am ill at ease in the presence of these

beings, who can read a thought which is actually never uttered."

"You said it, sir," cried Griggs. "I still thinks as 'ow we're goin' ter meet the Old Man pretty soon. Oh Crickey—wot wouldn't I give to be sittin' in the Red Lion down the Old Kent Road!"

"Although it sounds quite absurd, I feel that there ought to be some way for us to get out of this underworld," I said, after a few moments' thought.

"Thanks for them kind words, sir. I wish I thought so too," said Griggs, sorrowfully.

"Upon what grounds do you base your beliefs?" asked the professor with renewed interest.

When he put the question to me in that way, I felt rather foolish. I had no grounds for such a belief; in fact I had spoken rather in the spirit of bolstering up my own falling hope than from any reasoned conclusion. Yet, as I thought the matter over, I found some grounds at least for thinking that we could perhaps escape from this place, and regain our fellow beings in the world that now seemed so far away from us.

"We got here in the first place, and it seems that it ought to be possible to get out again," I said at last rather lamely. "If there is a way in, there ought to be a way out."

The professor seemed distinctly disappointed at this weak answer. He was turning away to inspect a new variety of foliage that lay on the ground near him, when suddenly, as though caught by some invisible hand, it was whisked away out of sight.

"Well, I'll be ——!" muttered the professor in great perplexity. "Wind—down here! Wind! Will wonders never cease?"

As he spoke, there commenced a tremendous fluttering. Leaves of the woolly substance were caught up and

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The Bat-Men of Thorium

(Continued from page 598)

whisked away into space; trees bent their frail backs to the blast; and there swooped down upon us a very tornado of wind.

While we were struggling to obtain shelter from the blast, Griggs had been at the door of the house. He came back to us in great excitement. He had apparently noted something that was of importance.

Bursting upon us he said: "That's the answer to our question—that's it—that there gale."

"I'm afraid you will have to be more explicit," said the professor.

We had learned that Griggs had a head that should be reckoned with in any affair of this kind, and therefore we listened carefully to him.

"Why, don't you see, gentlemen, there's the way out for us? That wind is as different from the air down here with its hot dryness as cheese is from chalk. Besides, who ever heard of gales of wind inside the earth? It isn't reasonable. No sir—that wind with its fresh salt tang has just come from the earth above us, and the way it got here is the way we can get back. Don't you see it now, sir?" he addressed me eagerly.

"Of course I do. And I can't help but feel that you are right, too," I said heartily.

"It seems incredible that we have not thought of it before. If there is air here, it must have come down from the atmosphere around the earth. It could not exist here inside the globe. Your words give us added hope, Griggs," said the professor, pointing his chin into the teeth of the breeze, evidently trying to guess where it came from.

Soon the wind died down, and as the air became still once more, we began to realize how tired our

muscles had become. We lay down on the soft couches and slept.

I WAS awakened by Griggs some time later. The same green luminosity covered everything, so that there was no possibility of reasoning how long we had slept. It might have been days, or it might have been only a few hours. My watch was a poor guide under the circumstances, and anyway Eastern standard time meant less than nothing down here.

Griggs was excitedly running to and fro, apparently searching for something. I came up with him outside the house and asked him what was wrong. He stopped for a minute to answer my question.

"The professor," he said pantingly. "He's gone, and I don't know when he went away, or where he went."

It was true, the professor was nowhere to be seen. I looked quickly around. There was apparently only one path that he could have taken, and that led up the hill, and under the white foliage of the forest. I did not doubt that he had pursued this path in search of some rare specimen, or perhaps in chase of some butterfly that had flitted by him. I conferred with Griggs, and we decided that to one of the professor's impractical nature such a journey might be filled with danger, and therefore we ought to follow and try to overtake him as soon as possible. We therefore started at a smart pace up the hill, and under the trees. The overhanging foliage made the place very dark, and we continually struck ourselves against projecting limbs and rocks, but we did not stop to bewail our misfortunes. We were too intent on finding the professor.

On all sides grew abundant fruit, of the same variety as that which

we had been given to eat by the servants in Diegon's palace. The wind had died away, or perhaps was not so noticeable because we were sheltered by the trees. We continued our course for some minutes, without seeing any trace of the professor, when I thought I heard a rustling sound ahead of us, which might have been made by the professor in his ardent search for the butterfly. We stopped a moment to listen, and our suspicion was confirmed. That it was the sound produced by the professor

in his excited chase of some rare species, I doubted not. We now increased our speed and were soon rewarded by a sight of the professor. A few more steps brought us up with him. He was so intent upon his search that he did not notice our advent, until I took his arm.

Wiping the perspiration from his brow, he stopped with a smile.

"I saw you fellows were busy sleeping, and so I started out alone to explore this place. I have been keenly interested, so that I did not

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notice the passage of time. I suppose I must have alarmed you. I am indeed sorry."

I told the professor that we were glad we had found him. There was nothing to be sorry about. I suggested that while we were out here, we might as well explore the place a little further, and the others acquiescing, we started forward along the trail, which appeared to be more or less well worn.

The professor fell into a fit of abstraction and for a while did not answer my queries. Whether he was thinking of something he had seen, or of something pertinent to our escape, I could not tell. After a while, he spoke.

"You know, Griggs said more than he thought when he spoke about that gale of wind being the way out for us. If we could only find the place whence it came, we might be able to devise a means of escape from this hole."

"Apparently it has died away, and we may have to await a return of the gale before we can do that," I suggested.

"I don't think it has died away. I felt it strongly, when I wandered away from the shelter of these trees; besides, do you not hear that singing sound?"

I listened and did indeed hear a singing sound that might have been the scream of the wind above us. As we advanced, the sound seemed to grow in intensity. The noise began to reach appalling dimensions and struck terror into us, but still we proceeded, intent upon finding the origin of this rush of air.

The trees began to thin somewhat now, and the ground grew more rocky, so that we were much put to it to maintain our pace. Only the hope of deliverance kept us going. Through the gradually thinning trees on our left hand we could see the placid waters of the lake which surrounded Thorium. We were evident-

ly pursuing a course around the island.

After another half-hour of this walking, during which the wind blew more and more strongly in our faces, we emerged entirely from the trees, and braced ourselves against the chill blast, which struck us with renewed fury. Our path now lay steeply uphill, and we seized every opportunity to shelter ourselves behind rocks wherever they offered protection.

We were rapidly approaching the origin of the blast. It seemed to emerge from a huge black hole in the rock, for we could see the vegetation around the mouth of the hole or cave, whatever it was, bending to the rushing air.

"I believe we are at the limits of Thorium," said the professor thoughtfully, but with a degree of restrained excitement.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He did not reply for a moment, but seemed to be bent upon establishing some fact before he replied. At length he lowered his eyes, for he had been peering upward.

"Yes—it is so. Another twenty feet will carry us to the roof, or whatever you care to call it, of this cavern, for it is really that."

Griggs had been searching the sky, as I must still call it, and now spoke.

"Yes. That's right, Professor. I can see all sorts of rocks and crags stickin' out of that roof above us. By Hokey! I've got it! That big black hole up there with the wind rushing out of it is the hole we must get through to return to the world." He turned to the professor anxiously for verification.

"Undoubtedly that is correct. We must be approaching the base of a lava tube. Probably this land of Thorium is situated within the enormous cavity of what has at one time been the reservoir that fed some gigantic volcano. Our only hope of reaching the surface again is to pur-

sue that tube over many miles, climbing upward, always upward, until we reach the blue sky once more."

"How many miles would you say we would have to go, Professor?" asked Griggs.

"That is indeed speculative. It might be ten, or a thousand. Some of these tubes are twisted and twined and catacombed in an almost unbelievable manner. We should have to chance the distance if we decided to try our luck at escape."

ALL this time, we had been approaching the black hole. Now it yawned dark and ugly ahead of us. The howling of the gale that swept upon us from what we now felt quite sure was the earth above us, almost deafened us, but above it I thought I detected some different noise, resembling indeed faintly the whirring of machinery. The others had heard it also, and we stood still, looking at each other in complete astonishment.

"That must be the Old Man's coffee grinder. I knowed as 'ow we'd 'ave to meet 'im before we got much further," said Griggs mournfully.

"Nonsense! I'm going to see what it all means," I said, taking a step toward the yawning mouth of the tube.

The wind almost swept me off my feet, and, indeed, I did crawl upon my hands and knees, which I found enabled me to make better progress. I noticed that the trail led slightly to one side of the entrance, and accordingly I followed it. I soon understood the reason for this. The blast emerged in an almost perfect pencil of air from the mouth, and to the side there was an almost complete calm at the entrance of the tube.

The path wound still farther away from the hole itself, and I crept warily forward, my two companions crawling slowly behind me; for we

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did not dare assume the perpendicular position for fear that we might be caught once more by the full force of the gale. It was not long before we found our progress arrested by a solid wall of rock. Dismayed, we stood staring about.

"This is indeed a strange conclusion to so startling a journey," began the professor, and stopped. He placed his ear to the wall of rock, once, then twice, and each time I watched the expression on his face.

"I believe I understand it now," he cried. "At least we may as well try it out."

Without waiting to explain his meaning, he began to lead us. We skirted the wall of rock with great care, and found what the professor seemed to have expected—a turning-point. One or two minutes more of walking, and we stopped. The noise that burst upon us now was deafening, but very different from that of the rushing wind.

The professor had found an opening in the wall, and was cautiously getting through. Griggs followed, and I came last. After we had all squeezed through, we looked in dumb amazement at the sight before us. We were in a gigantic power-house. Before us were huge engines, which were undoubtedly pumps for sucking the air from the world without. We could not determine the source of the noise, for there seemed to be no steam; in fact, at first we could not understand the motive power for the pumps. The professor supplied the answer.

"By George! These people are a step ahead of us in this also. Those are radium pumps, I would bet a dollar. Do you not see the great quantities of that luminous rock lying in those bins? That is evidently the pitchblende from which the power to operate these pumps is obtained. Marvelous—quite marvelous!"

"The marvel to me is that the ma-

chinery appears to operate itself. There is not a single living thing within this vast power-house," I said, at the same time carefully scanning the entire floor to confirm the statement. Peer and search as I would, however, I could not see any living being whatever.

While we had been standing there, the professor had wandered around the gallery upon which we stood. It was an area of only a few square yards, and there seemed to be no means of descending to the floor upon which the pumps were located. I looked across the great hall, and saw a pair of heavy doors set in the opposite wall. They appeared to be of very solid construction, and when closed would require a small army to force them open. This evidently was the main entrance, while that by which we had come upon the hall was merely some small observation platform, or perhaps even only a ventilation hole for the hall, though I could see little use for the latter if there were no men to operate the huge motors.

I could not help but marvel at the wonders which were becoming almost daily experiences for us. What would the scientific world say, I thought, about a great pumping system operated in the interior of the earth, sucking pure air from the surface? How would they receive the news of these enormous motors, the smallest of which could not have been less than a hundred feet in height, and powered by the disintegration of the atom? Even the most gullible of them might excusably scoff at such a story. And yet, here we stood actually within the hall where these great engines rolled with infallible precision.

The professor began to move once more to the hole by which we had entered. The air was too much confined for him, he said, and certainly this was true, but I lingered, my mind always of a mechanical bent,

dwelling upon every detail of the installation. I toyed with the possibilities of such an application of atomic energy in the power-houses of the surface. My eyes scanned every detail that might be used in the future for the duplication of such a plant. After a few minutes of this contemplation, I turned away with a smile. It would take not less than six months to familiarize myself with the details of the system. I was not even familiar as yet with the method of driving the enormous motors. If I wanted to learn anything, I would most certainly have to inspect the machinery at closer range. I determined to consult with Diegon before doing anything more. Probably he could supply me with details that would the more readily enable me to understand the fundamental principles upon which the plant was operated.

The professor had already left the hall, and Griggs and I turned to go. This time I went first through the small hole, which was only large enough to pass one at a time. I was about half through when I heard a faint cry. Pausing for a moment to listen more carefully, I heard it repeated. I recognized the professor's voice, but it was wrung in accents of agony. I stopped for nothing more, but regardless of projections and sharp stones, I wormed my way through the hole at a great speed, and soon emerged on the other side. Standing up, I looked anxiously around. But though I searched every section of the landscape with my eyes, I could see no traces of my dear friend. I listened intently for a repetition of the cry that might give me some clue to his whereabouts, but none came. Except for the whirring of the pumping machinery, a deep silence brooded over all. The professor had disappeared!

The terrific combats between the bat-men and the Zoags, and the thrilling adventures of the friends amid frightful dangers, will be described in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES.



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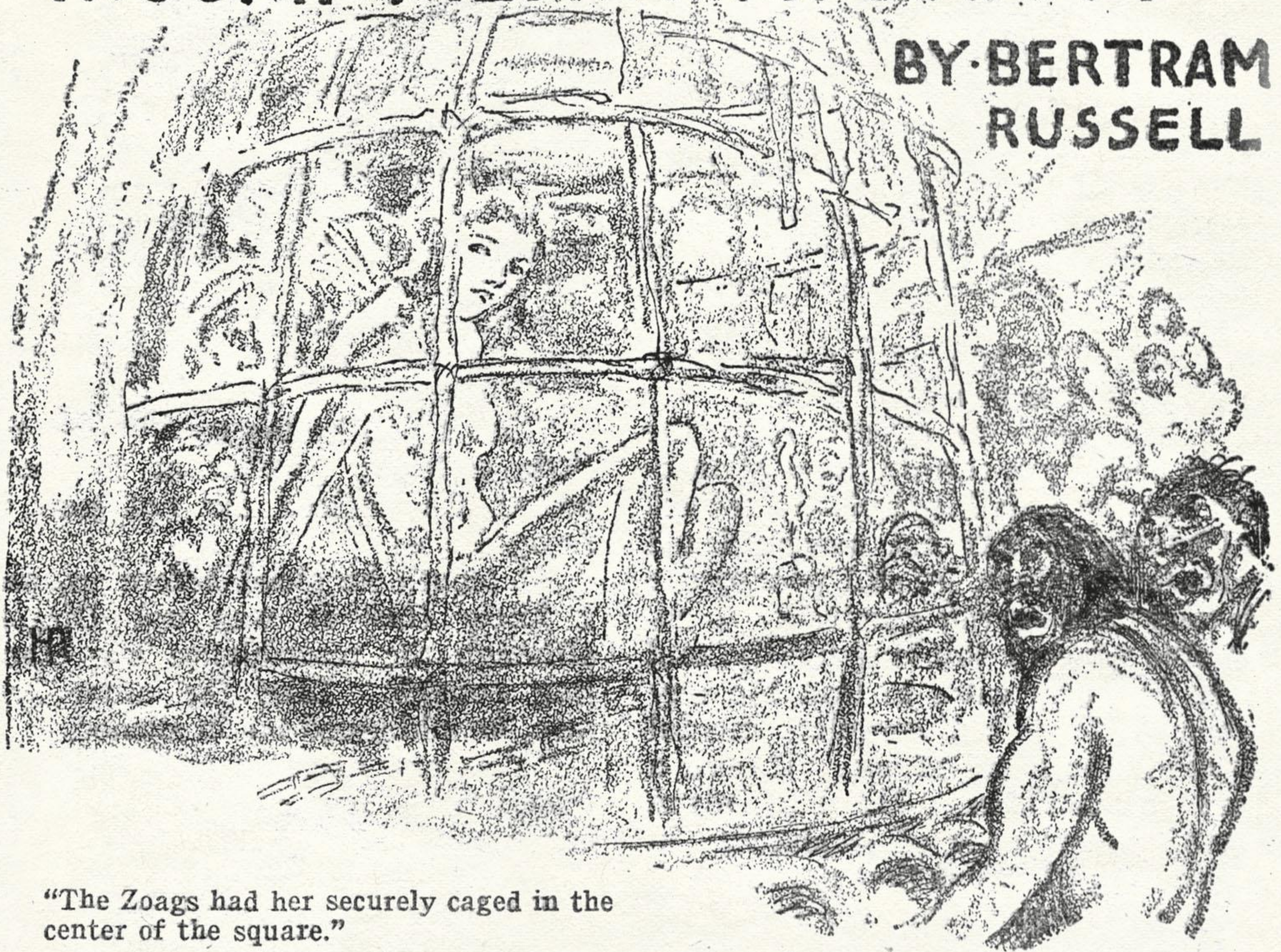
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The BAT-MEN of THORIUM

BY BERTRAM
RUSSELL



"The Zoags had her securely caged in the center of the square."

The Story Thus Far

PROFESSOR PERRY and his party, making deep-sea researches in a specially constructed submarine, are sucked down five miles below the ocean's surface by a maelstrom. At the bottom of the ocean they are attacked by a gigantic octopus, which encircles the submarine with its tentacles. Cutting the tentacles and freeing the submarine from the monster's grip, they are then drawn by the rush of the ocean current into a long tunnel, and thence into a vast cavern, and finally emerge into a great underground lake, five miles below the surface of the Pacific Ocean. The vegetation is white and beautiful, and as the *Atlantis* moves along, in the phosphorescent light the crew sees that many winged forms are flying above them. These are the strange bat-men, who inhabit the island of Thorium, ruled by Diegon. The bat-men communicate silently, by reading one another's thoughts. They have mastered decay and death, and have lived for countless years. The crew of the submarine, on landing, are attacked by terrible beings known as Ottars, but shoot their way to freedom, and are entertained by Diegon, the ruler of the bat-men. Diegon's daughter, Thalia, has been kidnaped by the Zoags, or ape-men, and Diegon asks the Americans to assist in rescuing her. While they are investigating the power house, run by atomic energy, with which the bat-men suck fresh air from the outer world into Thorium through a vent in the earth, the professor utters a cry. His friends turn around, but the professor has disappeared.

This story began in *WEIRD TALES* for May

THE sense of catastrophe lay heavy upon me. It seemed like a stroke of fate that the professor had been snatched from our sight when escape lay at hand. Now we should be forced to stay in this underground world until we had either recovered the professor or discovered his remains; for I was quite sure that he was in dire peril. His agonized cry still rang in my ears. Whatever it was that he had seen or stumbled upon, it certainly had had power to terrorize him completely. It was the thought of this that exasperated me and the faithful Griggs, as we stood uncertainly surveying the rocky cavernous aspect of the place, hoping against hope to discover the professor with his ankle caught in some hidden

hole, or to see him come limping back to us with a new sort of specimen, to capture which he had had to place himself in danger. But there was not a single trace of my dear friend, and I knew that it was something very much more dangerous than these simple accidents that had wrung from him that cry of agony.

Griggs stood at my side, his clothing torn into shreds, his hands cut and bleeding, mute evidence to the frantic search search he had just concluded.

I turned to him with a wry face. "What is it to be now?" I said.

I had come to expect from the little cockney a certain form of mental activity that I completely lacked. Although he was not overburdened with brain-power, he still possessed a faculty that served admirably to reinforce my own thinking ability, and even in many cases to lead the way when nothing but complete mental darkness enshrouded me. It was a sort of intuition. He had given abundant evidence of it already, in his sensing of things that the intellect of the professor and me had kept hidden from us. For instance in the matter of the gale of wind, where Griggs had unerringly scented its origin at the surface of the earth, and in its intuitive knowledge that led him first of the three of us to realize that we were actually inside the earth, it had proved of inestimable value to us. It was, therefore, without any qualms that I addressed to him a remark that might have seemed very unusual under circumstances less extraordinary. Griggs had only half heard my question. He was peering intently into the gloom that surrounded us upon all sides, here at this high point in the limits of Thorium.

"It looks to me as if the professor has been attacked by some living thing, and either killed, or carried away, because otherwise he would have answered our calls just now."

Griggs still continued to stare into

the gloom, and I began to wonder whether he had found a clue, when he turned to me. "There is somebody coming down from behind that power house," he whispered, forgetting that voice meant nothing down here in Thorium, where thoughts themselves were the means of conversation.

I followed his gaze, and after some moments detected a shadowy form moving across the rocky ground in our direction.

After some minutes the man came near to us. I gasped with relief. "It's Diegon," I said to Griggs.

"Don't you be too sure," said the little cockney, peering at the newcomer, who indeed did not seem to recognize us.

At length he stood before us, and I knew that it was not Diegon, although the resemblance was startling enough. Like the other batmen, he addressed me in silence.

"You are perhaps looking for a friend who has disappeared?" he began.

I nodded acquiescence.

"It is useless to search more now. I came as soon as I could, for I apprehended struggling, but I was not in time to prevent your friend from meeting a fate that many of my fellows have fallen victim to."

"You mean he has been killed, sir?" cried Griggs, wringing his hands helplessly.

"No. He has not been killed as yet, but it is more than probable that he will die in a few days. He has been carried off by the Zoags."

"Ah yes. Your natural enemies," I interrupted. "The great Diegon has told us of them."

"Yes. My brother has been harassed by them much of late."

I understood the reason for the great resemblance which this creature bore to Diegon. They were brothers. I remembered that Diegon had told us about a brother who tended the air supply.

"If you will come with me, you may see your friend as he is carried away by our enemies," said the old man, whose name was Dodd. I smiled at the whimsical notion of a man with an earth-used patronymic here miles below the surface. But he had started to return up the hill, and Griggs and I followed carefully.

WE WOUND around the hillside, ascending gradually in the direction of the great power-house. With every step its motors whirred louder in our ears. At length we came before the main gate, which we had seen from our tiny platform when we had first stumbled upon the suction plant. Instead of passing through this, however, we skirted it, and after a few more seconds of climbing, emerged upon the roof of the power plant, which was, in fact, the highest point in Thorium, and the nearest, therefore, to our own world upon the surface.

Dodd pointed down into the depths below us, and after some seconds of straining my eyes I caught a glimpse of what he saw. It was my first sight of a Zoag. Scampering down the rocky incline, now far out of reach of any pursuit that we might offer, there was a monstrous thing that looked at first sight more like an ape than anything human. Dodd informed me that it was one of the Zoags. It held the professor loosely, as though he had been a bag of straw in a huge arm, which was twined around my friend. He swung with his free arm, and hopped hither and thither in his descent. He had reached the forest now, and I marveled at the ease with which he swung from bough to bough of the strange white trees, using only his free arm. I saw that the arms were of enormous length in comparison with the legs, and the body was very dark in color, being at this distance almost black.

I feared for the safety of my

friend as I saw him borne helpless by this grotesque thing. The creature had skirted the forest, and had changed his course slightly, so that he appeared to be making for the water's edge. I noticed a small boat that lay against the land in the direction ahead of him. With a few bounds he leaped for it, but suddenly he swung upon his heel, still clinging to the professor in that loose grasp. I wondered what had caused him to stop, but had not long to wait. A flood of joy filled me at what I saw. The Ottars! In my excitement I had forgotten those strange creatures, white as the driven snow, huge things clumsy and heavy but faithful friends of the bat-men. Dodd noted my excitement and smiled wanly.

"It will not avail us aught," he said. "They can not swim."

I looked at the figures at the water's edge, and before long his opinion was confirmed. The foremost of the Ottars flew at the great Zoag, but with a single stroke of his huge arm the Zoag felled the white thing. Another and yet another tried to stay him, but the Zoag held his own, and stood still, prepared to withstand further onslaughts. I began to apprehend some purpose to the movements of the Ottars, however. They were gradually circling around the back of the Zoag. I could see that their object was to cut off the retreat to the boat. Undoubtedly if there were enough of them, they could prevent his escape by sheer force of numbers.

"I'm going to get down a bit lower, and take a shot at that big monkey," said Griggs, who had been unhitching his revolver as we looked. "It's no use standing here, and we may still be able to save the professor."

"Don't risk a shot unless you are sure that you can fire without hitting the professor," I cautioned as he

leaped down the mountainside. He motioned assent.

Dodd and I watched the conflict with breathless interest. The Ottars had almost cut off the retreat of the Zoag, when he turned and perceived their design. Wildly, then, he flung himself upon them, his arm flailing to right and left at his opponents. He even used the professor as a sort of battering-ram, swinging him at his attackers as though he had been a bag of flour. I trembled for the safety of my poor friend.

Griggs, down the mountainside, had seen the danger also, and I saw him kneeling down, taking accurate aim with the sights of his revolver. I prayed that the marksmanship that he had learned which had earned him such praise in "His Majesty's submarines" might stand us in good stead now. Through what seemed an eternity, Griggs waited. The Ottars had retreated slightly, so that there was a comparatively clear space around the Zoag. He turned slowly, so that his back was spread before Griggs. Now was the time! I eagerly awaited the report from Griggs' revolver. Suddenly, it shattered the silence. With a burst of flame, the bullet sped on its way, but too late. The Zoag had started to turn again the instant that Griggs had fired, so that the best the bullet could do would have been to pierce an arm or leg. This it must have done, for suddenly the Zoag staggered and seemed about to fall. In his pain, he dropped the professor, who lay still upon the ground. How I wished he had strength enough to flee now that he was free!

The Ottars, who had stood wonderingly around, quite unable to comprehend the cause of the Zoag's distress (for they could not hear the report of the pistol), now advanced cautiously upon him. With a last gathering of his strength, however, he grasped the professor, and started to dart hither and thither with

movements of lightninglike agility. He was even able, with the help of his powerful limbs, to vault completely over the smaller of the Ottars who surrounded him. He had now a free space between himself and his boat, and leaping in great jumps, he commenced to shorten the distance between himself and it.

Griggs was madly descending the mountainside in an effort to overtake him before he could escape, but it was all quite hopeless from the start. He would not now be able to fire without danger of killing the professor, and the Zoag was already pushing his craft into the water. The Ottars who had chased him to the water's edge now stood impotently around while the Zoag paddled himself and his captive out upon the lake.

Griggs took one half-hearted shot at the departing quarry, but it splashed harmlessly into the water beside the boat. The Zoag had escaped.

THE little cockney came panting up the hill to my side, strapping his gun back in place.

"There is only one thing to do now," I said to him. "We must get to the *Atlantis* as fast as we can, and start in pursuit."

The old man Dodd spoke. "It is war," he said. "We have known for ages that it had to be. First they take Thalia, my brother's daughter, and now they take your friend, our guest. Two such acts can not be overlooked. There must be battle. It will be a fight for the domination of the world itself." By "world," of course, he meant the world that we were in then—the whole world, so far as he understood it.

"What is to be done first?" I asked him.

"The entire plan of campaign will have to be worked out," answered Dodd. "First you and your friend must speed to Diegon, my brother,

and apprise him of the facts that have taken place."

"But—the professor——" I began.

"He will be safe for a space. The Zoags always exhibit their captives in the public place for long before putting them to death. You must hurry to Thorium, and acquaint Diegon with all. He will devise a scheme. Now haste away—time is valuable."

"But you——" I began.

"I can not leave this place. My duty is to keep this plant in operation. Without it, the people of Thorium would perish in short order. Once it did nearly happen, when the former keeper, my father, died. He passed suddenly, and none knew of it, until the air became hot and heavy, and people gasped for breath. Since then, I have not left this place for more than the shortest time."

"Very well; we will hasten to Diegon, and tell him all," I said, and with the words, Griggs and I swung on our heels and hurried down the mountainside.

But our steps were heavy. The last time we had come over this path, the professor had been with us. We would have been happy to stamp our feet in impatience while he scampered away after butterflies, if only he could have been with us once more. But we both knew that the way was long before we should see our friend again, and indeed, we might never see him again alive.

As we walked slowly down the jagged side of the incline that would lead us back to the city of Thorium, I could not help but wish that I had never commenced this terrible journey. It was only a few days ago that we had sailed bravely forth, and the smiles and farewells of our relatives and friends were still fresh in my memory. Days! It seemed that we had been away from civilization for centuries. Our remoteness from all the affairs of the outside world separated us from humanity by a barrier higher than mere time.

We were literally lost to the world of men.

But reality was still with us, nevertheless. A low sound from Griggs recalled me from my reflections to the affairs of the moment. He had drawn me to a standstill, and was warningly holding me back with his left arm. What it was that had alarmed him, I was at a loss to discover. Presently, however, I saw that which had occasioned his caution. We were surrounded by the Zoags!

APPARENTLY, as yet we had remained unseen, and these creatures, who had already constituted themselves our natural enemies, were engaged upon some other business. We had evidently stumbled upon a scouting party, invading the limits of Thorium. The trees were full of them, scampering in the same direction as that which we were pursuing. They darted from rock to boulder with the agility of monkeys, which, indeed, they greatly resembled. But there was another reason for their presence here. Ahead of us there was gathered a knot of the repulsive things, who stood eagerly looking at something in their midst, much as a street crowd in our surface cities stands watching a man who has fallen and sprained an ankle, or clamors about the man selling the patent potato peeler, or the necktie fastener. Every second the crowd became denser, as more Zoags appeared from every hand. From the trees they jumped, from the rocks they poured, a writhing mass of ugly, slimy-appearing green monsters, neither men nor animals, gesticulating wildly, and speaking in a cackle of gutturals, exactly as the apes do upon the surface. They were excitedly talking and pointing at something in their midst.

Their intentness was so great that Griggs and I were able to approach quite close to the group without any

danger of being discovered. Griggs drew me aside, and whispered into my ear. "They've got one of them bat-men there and they're a-torturin' 'im."

I looked through a breach in the crowd, and could occasionally discern the white outline of one of the beautiful flying creatures that had treated us so kindly. His face writhed in pain, and I could see the brutal arms of the captors as they twisted his delicate frame in a process of torture. Before each new attack, they addressed him in the same gutturals. The bat-man made no reply, and the torture was repeated.

"The fools," I thought. "Do they not know that he can not speak?"

"What do you think they're up to, sir?" Griggs said.

"I think they must be trying to extort information," I answered after a few moments of reflection. I had thought that a few vibrations of telepathic speech had reached me from the agonized bat-man, and they had seemed to me to be negative—evidently a refusal to tell whatever it was that he knew of value to his captors. Griggs was quite unable to "hear" this speech, but he became satisfied that I was right. "The question is—how are we going to prevent those blighters from killin' that poor fellow?" he said, fingering his pistol lovingly.

Clearly, it would not be easy for the two of us to vanquish this crowd of Zoags, after what we had already witnessed of their fighting prowess. I thought a moment. The Zoags were standing clustered in a small open space by the roadside. There were no trees very close to them—nothing but hard rock. An idea came to me. But we should have to be speedy if we were to save the unfortunate bat-man from an untimely death.

I communicated the scheme to Griggs, and together we carefully crept away to the shelter of the

forest that lay a few paces away. We then gathered a few branches from the strange white trees and laid them upon the ground. Then I took a box of matches which I had fortunately remembered to bring with me from the *Atlantis*. Griggs then circled away from me into the forest to a spot nearer the assembled Zoags, and opposite my position. We lighted matches, and carefully applied them to the branches. The foliage, which, as I have already stated in this history, was very much like cotton wool, caught fire as though it had been tinder, and burned brightly. There was no rain here, and consequently it was not moist as our earth-leaves would be in the same circumstances. I had noticed that the denizens of this world were quite unacquainted with the properties of fire. They had no means of producing it, and because fire was quite unnecessary for them, they had sought no method of producing it. So far as I knew, they had never seen flame before. This was the chief merit of my plan.

I stood still, awaiting the given signal. Griggs, when properly concealed and ready, was to fire his pistol into the air. I counted upon the report, at such close quarters, to alarm the Zoags, who would have their ear-drums well nigh shattered by the explosion. It did. With one accord, they all stood motionless, having dropped the bat-man, who was quite forgotten for the moment in this new terror.

Griggs was not slow to follow up his advantage. Suddenly from the shelter of the trees there came hurtling a great blazing limb of the woolly substance. Griggs' aim was true. It fell with a slight plop in the midst of the astonished Zoags. There was a howl of agony, as the flames, burning at the foot of one of them, scorched his body. Hurriedly he stooped to pick up the blazing limb, but more hurriedly he dropped

it—not, however, upon the ground, but upon the toes of one of his comrades, who kicked it with a howl of agony into the back of his neighbor. We had been pelting the terrified Zoags with the flaming branches, accompanying them with occasional shots into the air, whose noise reverberating in that still atmosphere must have sounded like the crack of doom to the Zoags. The whole place seemed afire where they stood. They recognized the woolly branches for what they were, but their horror of the fire was apparent on every face. They must have thought that the inanimate trees had suddenly assumed malignant intentions and were bent upon their destruction.

WE WERE nearly out of branches now, and the Zoags were commencing to run from the accursed spot. Griggs had been unable to restrain his excitement, for he had not waited for them to leave altogether. It was enough for him that they were alarmed and fleeing. As I watched the scene, I saw the strangest apparition loom from the shades of the forest. It was a grotesque figure of a man, with gaunt arms flailing about it, in circles of fire. Flame and smoke ascended from its head too, while roars of the most terrible character proceeded from its throat. This was the final straw that broke the back of the Zoags. Dropping everything, they ran. Griggs immediately stopped his gesticulating and pantomime, and hastily stooped to the fallen bat-man.

I had emerged as soon as I had seen Griggs' foolhardy action, and was immediately at the side of my friend. Together, we bore the weakened man away from the scene of the encounter. As I saw the slowly smoldering embers of the branches, I could not help but smile at the simple plan which had sufficed to outwit these monsters, where the attack of

a score of men might have proved fruitless.

But my smile froze on my face. Some of the Zoags, evidently less impressionable than their comrades, had stayed within range of the place, and as we bore the injured man away, I saw that they were cautiously lifting the fast-dying coals from the ground, and examining them. Some idea of what had taken place seemed to glimmer upon them, for they angrily threw the burned branches away, and muttering those gutturals which were the speech of their kind, they stood defiantly, as though inviting a return of the onslaught.

Since it did not come, they began to peer around in search of their escaped captive. I knew then that we must be discovered, although we hurried as fast as we could. We had almost reached the shelter of the trees when they saw us. With a great shout, the largest, who was evidently some kind of leader, came at us. We took to our heels and fled. We hoped to keep out of reach of the lumbering Zoags until we were within the jurisdiction of the city of Thorium, beyond which we knew they would not dare to come.

Panting, slipping, and sliding, Griggs and I dashed wildly on, always in the direction of Thorium. The shouts of the pursuing Zoags were ever at our ears, and once when I attempted a hasty glance over my shoulder, I saw the murderous features of a huge green thing almost at arm's length. But we again increased our speed.

The buildings of Thorium were in sight now, and we did not spare ourselves in that last mad race. We ran wildly up the great avenue that led to the main gate of the city. Our pursuers, too, were straining every nerve in an effort to capture us before we could come within the walls. We were within a stone's throw of the

great walls, when I tripped upon a stone, and the three of us went hurtling upon the road. From behind there came excited shouts, as our pursuers saw the accident. In a trice we were pounced upon by the green monsters, and our plight was an unenviable one indeed.

The bat-man, however, had struggled from the grasp of the Zoags, and flying bravely to the city, must have brought the news. Suddenly, as the Zoags were about to drag Griggs and me away, to be pilloried in their market-place, we heard the flapping of hundreds of wings. I could not help but admire the beautiful sight, great though my danger was, as I watched the graceful motions of the hundreds or more bat-men, who sailed through the air, in perfect formation, hurrying yet unhurried, to our rescue. The Zoags saw them too, and, evidently deciding not to try conclusions with this dauntless array, dropped us and fled up the avenue and out of sight.

IT WAS a sorry-looking pair that the bat-men carried before the dais of the great Diegon. But our story had evidently preceded us. We saw the wounded man who had been saved by our subterfuge, standing at the side of the dais. His face beamed with love, as we approached Diegon.

"My friends," said Diegon, "you have done well. I have heard of your rescue of my son from the hand of our enemies. It is good. I hope I may later repay you for the act."

The young-looking man was smiling, too, as he acquiesced in his father's words.

"I was traveling to my uncle—Dodd, the guardian of the air—when they fell upon me, and sought to obtain information of our plans to recover my dear sister Thalia," he said.

"We have but a short while ago left your uncle," I answered. The

surprise on Diegon's face was plain. "If you will permit me, I will tell you all," I continued.

Diegon nodded assent, and with an occasional correction from Griggs, I recounted the circumstances of the kidnaping of the professor by the Zoag, and ended with the declaration of Dodd that this meant war.

The faces of all were grave when I had finished. Diegon and his son seemed to be communing together, though I could not interpret their meanings. At length they turned to me.

"You are right. It is war!" Diegon pronounced. "First they take my dear Thalia, then they steal your friend, and lastly, they attack and try to kill my son. There is but one answer. Death and destruction! The Zoags must learn their lesson. I have been over-easy with them. They understood it not. They took my tolerance for dread. Now by blood and ruin must they learn that they shall harass us no more. After you are rested, we will say more of this."

We were led away from the great council chamber by the same attendants as before, and rested in the same apartment as on the preceding day. We were very tired, and soon fell asleep.

It was surely some hours later when we awoke, or rather were awakened by the gentle shaking of one of our attendants. We ate hastily, and were again led into the great council chamber. But what a different aspect it presented to the eye now! Its vast width was packed with thousands of the bat-men. They covered the smooth floor, they flitted in the air, they clung to columns overhead. They were everywhere. And what a gorgeous array!

These were evidently the fighting units of Thorium. They were ranged in orderly array about the great hall. Though the Thoriumites wore no clothing (unless, indeed, their great wings which they habitually

kept folded about them were to be regarded as clothing), these men wore small vestlike garments of the brightest colors I had ever seen. They were mostly shades of those strange violets and reds. But there were other colors also. These apparently served to distinguish the different fighting units from each other. Surrounded by some twenty or twenty-five men, also clad in the brightly colored uniforms, sat Diegon on the great dais. These men, evidently his military commanders and generals, made way for Griggs and me to pass as we approached the dais. With a graceful gesture of his wings, the venerable Diegon bade us come to his side and be seated.

When we were comfortably seated near him, and all motion had ceased within the hall, so that a significant silence prevailed, Diegon addressed the gathered throng about him:

"Brothers: For ages we have endured the acts of our enemies, the Zoags, believing that in course of time they might come to learn charity such as we ourselves practise. But in their ignorance they have accepted our attitude of tolerance for one of fear, and now they seek to dominate the world. They have offered us unbearable insults recently, and we can not bear them longer and still call ourselves men. It is to be the age-long conflict between mind and matter, between brain and brawn. And we have developed our minds, at the expense of our bodies. It will therefore be no easy matter if we are to achieve victory. It may require all the resources of Thorium. There will be rivers of blood flowing into our sea before the conflict is ended. Every resource you can bring to bear, my brothers, will be needed to win such a war. Answer me. Are you ready?"

It was a thrilling sight to see all those thousands of winged creatures, gathered in the lofty hall, as they pledged themselves to the cause.

There was no shouting, no rowdy flag-waving, but still I felt more powerfully than if I had heard it their acceptance of the words of their ruler. Like statues of white marble they stood erect and motionless, their wings folded about them, their firm jaws signifying their determination.

"It is good," said Diegon, who had understood their assent. "Let us to the consideration of plans."

He turned to Griggs and me. "Do you wish to assist us in this war, as you once stated?"

Griggs' hand strayed to his pistol, and I remembered his readiness for a scrap at any time. I therefore answered for both of us.

"It is so," I said. "We must join with you, if only to rescue our dear friend."

"Ah, yes. Your friend. I had almost forgotten him. Perhaps he may be able to aid us. My daughter is behind walls, and carefully guarded. She can therefore aid us but little. Let us hope that things are not so with your friend."

"I only want to know that they have not killed him yet," said Griggs, wrathfully.

"That we shall soon learn," replied Diegon gravely.

WHAT happened during the next few minutes defies description. Words can be but feeble when an attempt is made to express the uncanny effect that it all produced upon me.

Diegon sat motionless upon the great dais. There was not a movement from the gathered thousands about him. It was a silence as of the grave. I looked at Diegon. He seemed to be gazing away into the far distance, and his face was lined with a deep concentration. I began to wonder what was to happen. Clearly all were expecting something to take place, but I was wholly unprepared for what actually did happen. I stood tensely waiting, like all

the expectant throng about me. Then came the voice! Pure and clear, it echoed throughout my consciousness, for I know that I only heard it within myself. It was the most uncanny thing that ever occurred to me. I placed my fingers in my ears, but the voice rang with undiminished vigor. Strong and clear, it spoke in scholarly language and cultured tones. The voice and words of my friend the professor!

Then there followed the most extraordinary conversation that the mind of man could ever conceive.

"I feel that someone calls me, though my eyes show me nothing," said the professor.

"It is I, Diegon," answered the old man. "Please attend with care."

"God bless my soul," came the professor's favorite expression. "Diegon! I must be dreaming! I'll soon find out."

He must have pinched himself in an attempt to ascertain whether he was dreaming or no, for he presently began again: "Well, I am certainly awake. But it is against all the laws of nature that I should thus be talking to Diegon when he is miles away from this place. It is utterly beyond my comprehension."

"You are indeed talking to Diegon, and we are going to rescue you shortly. Tell us please if you are in danger at present."

"God bless my—so I am not dreaming, then! I must remember to relate this before the faculty. Speech, miles from the speaker! It will electrify! But pardon me, sir—your question. No, there appears to be no immediate danger. I am at present fastened by some extremely unpleasant means to a sort of altar, prominently placed in the principal square of this city. Where I am, I can not say."

"You are in the power of the Zoags, and you need have no fear for at least one Opal more," answered Diegon. "They will exhibit you thus,

until the curiosity of the populace is satisfied, and then it is to be *Joost*."

"What is *Joost*?" said the professor.

"It is a custom of the Zoags. But do not be alarmed. We shall rescue you before it comes to that."

"Indeed, I hope so. These people are not at all friendly. They speak a language that I can not comprehend, if language it is at all. They receive my offers of friendship with jeers, and physical repulses. They are most unpleasant companions."

"Have you noticed any warlike preparations?" questioned Diegon.

"Yes. There is great excitement. Men are gathering everywhere. They seem to be ordered in some sort of way, for they congregate in crude formations that have the appearance of regularity. Arms of a crude sort there are also. There is much ado about the cleaning and polishing of warlike implements."

"Has there been any movement to leave as yet?"

"No. They are still mobilizing. They have brought enormous numbers of small boats together, and evidently intend to attack you by water. This has all been effected with the utmost secrecy. They evidently intend to surprize you. They also have sentries posted on prominent points, evidently to prevent the possibility of a surprize attack from you."

"Ah! Your words are of great value. We shall not permit ourselves to be surprized. Can you give us any idea about when they intend to attack us?"

"Yes. Perhaps I might. Of course I may be wrong, as I can only judge by what I see. I should say roughly—ah——!"

The professor's words died away at their most important point, smothered in a cry of pain. Try as he would, Diegon could not again reach the professor. Clearly, he had been attacked by the Zoags, or in some way prevented from continuing the

conversation. Perhaps they had suspected his silent conversation with us, and adopted some measures to still his voice. I shuddered to think what those measures might have been. Perhaps the dread *Joost* had been hastened. It might be that the professor was even now breathing his last.

To such conjectures there was no answer. Our only course lay in action. We knew much of the enemy's plans, and to thwart them must henceforth be our aim. He was planning to surprize us: therefore we must surprize him. He was planning offense: therefore we must adopt the offensive. We should have to strike fast, in order to rescue the professor and the Princess Thalia before it was too late.

The *Atlantis* lay gently floating at anchor a short distance away. With the thought of it, a plan came to me. We should have to use it to reach the kingdom of the Zoags. The bat-men, of course, would fly there, but we should need something that would float to reach the land of the enemy—the dim and dark island far away in the dark reaches of the lake. Griggs had also evolved some sort of plan that included the *Atlantis*, and in a whisper he told me of it. Diegon had not heard us, for he was deep in conversation with his captains.

BIDDING a hasty good-bye to Diegon and the court, we started rapidly for the submersible. We believed that this was the best means that we could employ to reach the land of the Zoags. With the electric power in operation, there would not be any sound to betray our presence to the Zoags, and by means of the periscope we could still navigate while completely submerged.

We had no difficulty in finding the craft, nor in getting the machinery started. After about an hour's cruise we were able to approach the land of the Zoags, where the Princess

Thalia and the professor were in such great danger. It is a very different country from the beautiful land of Thorium. Dark, dismal, and forbidding, it has no cities worth the name, no buildings, save a few hovels squatting upon the ground.

Navigating entirely by the periscope, a somewhat risky procedure at this close range, we were enabled to come very near the shores of the Zoags. The dim light made it almost impossible for us to distinguish individual objects by the aid of our periscope alone, but we thought after considerable experiment that we had successfully located the professor. It was indeed so. We could clearly see him, as we gradually skirted the shore. He was caged up securely in a prominent position in the center of a large square, surrounded by a wildly gesticulating throng, who, though they could not touch him, were still able to prod him with sticks, and to hit him with missiles. Not far away was a beautiful white-winged creature—unmistakably the Princess Thalia. We could not help but admire the splendid courage of both these captives, as they sat there caged and prisoners, but with their heads serenely aloft, seemingly quite ignorant of their tormentors below them.

"It ain't going to be the easiest job in the world to rescue them; is it, sir?" said Griggs ruefully.

I was forced to agree, but it had to be done somehow. Clearly our first duty was to rescue the princess, both because she was a woman, and also because she, having been longer in captivity, was more likely than the professor to be subjected to the *Joost*. Our most valuable weapon was the submarine, and the fact that our presence was quite unsuspected by the Zoags.

"Get the searchlights and the mitrailleuse ready!" I ordered. "But do not shoot unless it is unavoidable!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Griggs, the light of battle in his eye. I think he had been half afraid, for a few minutes, that I intended to return to Thorium for reinforcements. But we could not afford to await the coming of Diegon's hosts. By that time it would, perhaps, be too late. The speed with which they could travel was not to be compared with the faster cruising speed of the submarine.

"Surface!" I ordered, and Griggs started the elevating controls. Gradually the submarine rose to the surface, and the Zoags, still busy tormenting their prey, did not suspect that we were near. Noiselessly we edged to the very shore, and opened the hatch leading to the deck of the craft.

"Now!" I said.

Two beams of merciless white fire flashed upon the astonished Zoags, and we could see them standing together in a single compact mass, according to their usual custom, and blinking into the stupendous glare of the great Klieg lights, too dum-

founded to move. The strain upon their eyes, accustomed only to the dim radium emanation, must have been pitiless, and we doubted not that they were already almost blinded.

"I almost think it would be safe for us to advance upon them now; we are as good as protected by these lights, and yet I should like to see them take flight," I said.

"They're comin' at us, sir!" said Griggs eagerly, his finger twitching upon the trigger of the mitrailleuse.

I knew he longed for a rush, and he was not disappointed. At that moment I had an opportunity to admire the courage of the ape-men. With a single concerted movement, they rushed headlong into the heart of that blinding glare, intent upon annihilation. There was no hope for it. If they once succeeded in advancing to the submarine, they would sink her with their weight, open as she was to the outside air. They were only a few feet away.

"Fire!" I shouted, and turned my head away.

The terrific battle as the bat-men attack the city of the Zoags, and the appalling catastrophe that comes to Thorium, will be told in the gripping chapters that bring this story to an end in next month's
WEIRD TALES.

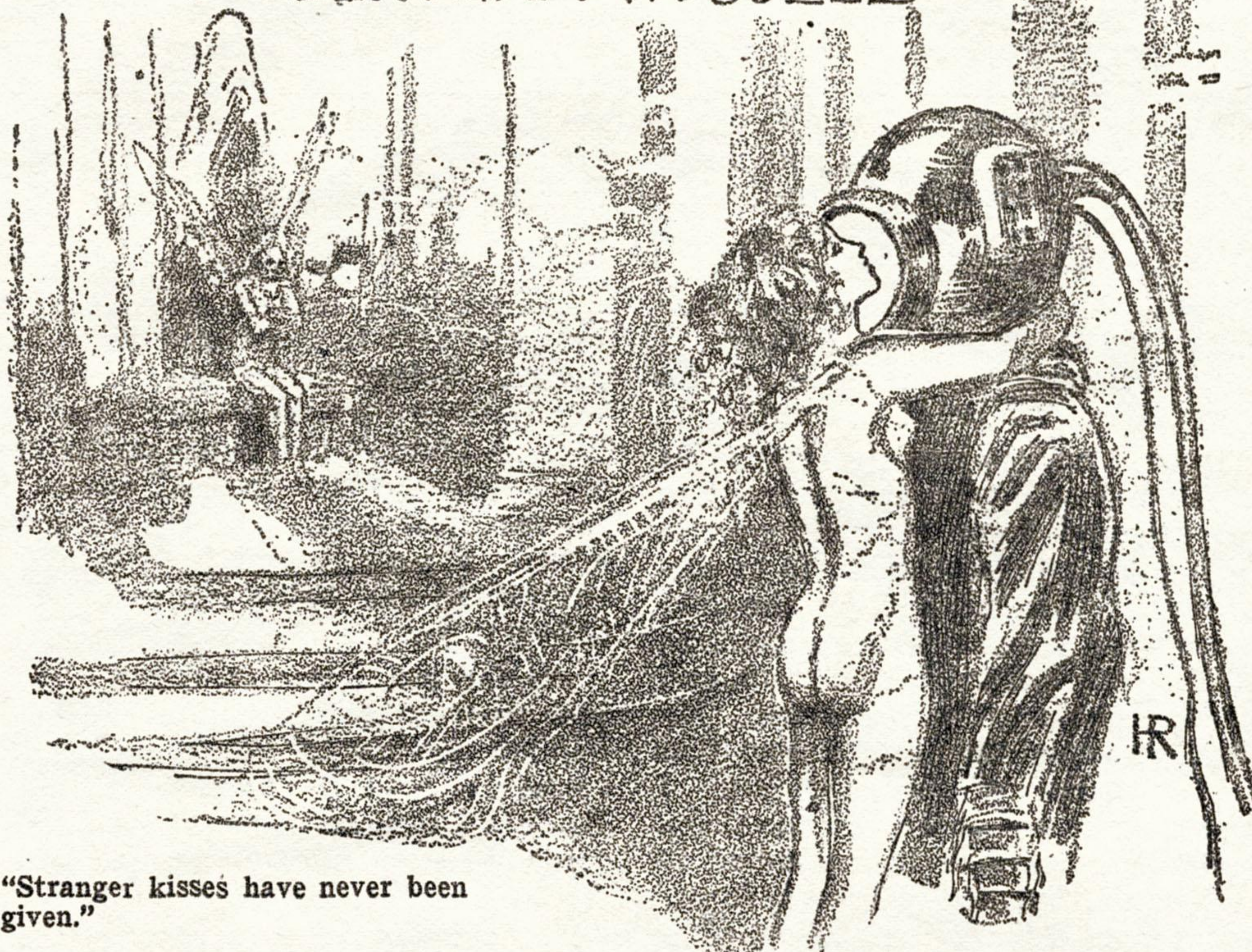
WILD HORSES

By EUGENE C. DOLSON

The moon throws out a ghostly light
Through storm-clouds hurrying by;
Fantastic forms take tireless flight
On banks piled mountain-high;
The white wild horses speed tonight
Across dark hills of sky.

THE BAT-MEN OF THORIUM

BY BERTRAM RUSSELL



"Stranger kisses have never been given."

The Story Thus Far

PROFESSOR PERRY and his party, making deep-sea researches in a specially constructed submarine, are sucked down five miles below the ocean's surface by a maelstrom. They are drawn into a vast cavern, and finally emerge into a great underground lake, five miles below the surface of the Pacific Ocean, where strange bat-men, with wings, inhabit the island of Thorium, ruled by Diegon. The bat-men communicate silently, by reading one another's thoughts. They have mastered decay and death, and have lived for countless years. Diegon's daughter, Thalia, has been kidnapped by the Zoags, or ape-men; and Professor Perry is also carried off by the Zoags as he is investigating the power house, run by atomic energy, by means of which the bat-men suck fresh air from the outer world into Thorium through a vent in the earth. The other members of the professor's party fight their way through the Zoags by setting fire to the strange white trees, amazing the Zoags, who have never seen fire. They rescue Diegon's son from the Zoags, and escape to Thorium. The bat-men raise an army to fly to the city of the Zoags and rescue Thalia and the professor, while the Americans proceed to the city in the submarine. The Zoags rush them, and the submarine opens fire upon them with a machine-gun.

THERE was a deafening rattle of bullets from the mitrail-leuse, and I could hear the screams of the Zoags as they fell in dozens. Griggs had ceased firing, and we surveyed their fallen ranks with a feeling of shame. Scores had fallen, and their comrades were in headlong retreat. We had cleared the way, but at what an awful price in blood! In a few seconds the marketplace was deserted.

"You release the professor," I said to Griggs, and together we started to crawl cautiously to shore. We were armed with revolvers and hand grenades in case of emergency.

Keeping as much in the dark as possible, we were able to proceed un-

seen, for we had extinguished the searchlights, and after their glare, we felt sure that the Zoags with their poor eyesight would not be able to see much for several minutes. I was able to approach quite close to the cage where the princess was held captive, and now came the most dangerous part of my task. I had to climb up the scaffolding which the Zoags had erected, and there, in full view of anybody who might have been looking, release the Princess Thalia. Carefully I looked around, but saw nothing that looked like a Zoag. I therefore crept to the base of the scaffolding, and began to climb.

I could not see any sign of Griggs at all, and concluded that he had not yet emerged from his hiding-place. Perhaps things were going to be easier than I thought, and yet the deep silence and desolation were ominous.

I had climbed half the way up, and nothing untoward had occurred. My hand was upon the heavy thongs that held the door of the cage fast. I reached into my pocket for the sharp knife with which I had planned to sever them, but, to my horror, it was not there. I must have dropped it on my way from the ship! I must attempt to untie the clumsy knots. Rapidly I began to disentangle them, while the beautiful creature inside the cage gazed breathless with excitement. Of course, her highly developed powers of mind-reading told her that I intended to rescue her, and, as I loosed the final knots, a dazzling smile illumined her features. I watched, fascinated, as this smile twisted into a grimace of horror. Guttural cries, the shouts of the Zoags, came to my ears! We were discovered!

"Spread your wings and fly," I said to the princess, but she refused. Evidently she would not leave me in the same plight in which I had found her.

The shouts continued, punctuated with revolver shots. I had almost

forgotten about Griggs in my excitement and my attempts to unloose the princess. I supposed that his courage had made him less cautious than he should have been, and now he was discovered, but whether it was he or I that the Zoags had seen first, I could not say. I could see hundreds of the ape-men running wildly in the direction of the submarine. Occasionally I caught a glimpse of Griggs as he turned to fire a shot at his pursuers. Of the professor there was no trace, and I supposed that he must still be in his prison. Griggs had failed! But he was putting up a brave fight for his life. A burst of fire and a deafening crash told me that he had hurled a grenade into the midst of his pursuers. I prayed that he would be enabled to get inside the submarine before it was too late.

- As for me, I was completely at a loss what to do. Alone and single-handed against a whole nation, I could not hope to effect much. The Zoags were clambering up the scaffolding, and it would be only a matter of minutes before they had us both safely imprisoned again, unless the princess consented to take my advice. I entered the cage, and again urged her to leave, but she remained obdurate. She seemed to be thinking. At length a smile lighted her beautiful face, and she communicated her thought to me.

She intended to fly back to Thorium, and to carry me there also! A daring idea, but not to be thought of for a second. Suppose my added weight should drag her into the water? I doubted her strength, especially after the confinement and torture to which she had been subjected. But she was determined.

Approaching me, she bade me cling tightly to her, and as this wonderful creature folded her white wings about me, I felt a dreamy ecstasy creep over me, in spite of the danger that threatened me. I loved this wonder-

ful woman who was about to risk her life to save me!

There followed an experience which I feel quite safe in saying has never before been vouchsafed to mortal man. With a great gliding movement we swooped from the cage into space. I felt her strain herself to the utmost to clear the hairy arms that were outstretched to clutch us from below. Her great wings beat the air, and I felt her surge resistlessly higher and higher over the heads of the gesticulating Zoags, who watched with dismay the flight of their prey. As we passed over the submarine, I could see Griggs with the mitrailleuse trained upon a horde of the enemy, valiantly trying to beat them back.

SOARING majestically, we passed from Zoagland, and over the deep dark, open sea. Gradually the shores of that awful place were left far behind. Over it a strange, unearthly red glare hung ominously; it might have been a reflection of the recent bloodshed, but it was something far more terrible than that, as we were soon to learn.

As the wondrous Thalia surged onward, I grew dizzy and my head whirled from watching the ceaseless rush of the water below us, but I had only to look up to find peace in the reassuring smile of my fair companion. A new tenderness was in her look, a caress in her thought as she bade me take courage.

"You, who have dared so much for me, have courage. A little more, and it will be over," she said. "I can dimly see the walls of my own city."

I peered ahead, and it was indeed true. In a few minutes more we were flying over the beautiful city of Thorium, and with a gentle glide, no slower than the swallow's, we alighted in the courtyard of the palace.

Diegon was seated on the dais, surrounded by his ministers of war.

We soon learned that his captains were away fighting, and the reports that kept coming in every few minutes indicated that all was not well with his armies.

There was no sign of either Griggs or the professor, and I was in despair of ever seeing them again. I was eager to return again to the fray, but there was no means of transportation. I could only sit there in the great hall and await news of my friends.

After perhaps half an hour of waiting, there was a commotion outside the palace. I started up gladly at sight of Griggs, who came up to the dais. In a few words he told his story. He had succeeded in reaching the prison where the professor was kept, but had been unable to release him before he was attacked by the Zoags and driven back to the ship. He had barely escaped with his life, as the cuts and bruises he bore testified. Once he had been able to train the mitrailleuse upon the enemy, however, he had repulsed them. He had entered the craft, and endeavored to start the submarine, but had been unable to do so, because the professor and I had always attended to that difficult part of the navigation. Frantically he had pushed and pulled, turned and twisted controls, while the infuriated Zoags clambered and clung to the outside of the vessel, trying to find a way to enter. At length he had got the machinery started, and returned to Thorium as soon as he was able. He had witnessed my escape with the Princess Thalia and expected to find me at Thorium.

The plucky fellow now announced it as his intention to return to the land of the Zoags to hunt for the lost professor. I immediately signified my intention of accompanying him, and together we started for the submarine. We immediately stepped aboard, and set a course that would bring us to the land of the enemy.

without delay. On our way, we were startled at seeing hundreds of boats, all heavily manned by Zoags, and concluded that they were bent upon carrying the battle into Thorium. It looked as if our friends were going to have a hard time of it. But we, for our part, could not abandon our search until we could learn for sure what had happened to the professor. As before, we brought our craft easily within reach of the shore, and, not stopping for any precautionary measures, we stepped upon the land.

A battle as strange as the mind of man may conceive was in progress as we advanced upon the town where the professor had been imprisoned, and which was evidently the capital of the Zoags. Masses of the hairy inhabitants stood together in great phalanxes while they tried to defend themselves from the attacks from the air. The graceful forms of the bat-men, generated by those uniformed commanders who had conferred so gravely with Diegon and ourselves in the great council chamber, were hovering above the Zoags.

The tactics of the Thorium army were indeed the only ones possible under the circumstances. Against the superior strength of the apelike Zoags they could not hope to win in a hand-to-hand encounter. They therefore swooped down, again and again, upon the exasperated Zoags, each bat-man choosing his own victim and grappling with him in such a way as to put him at the greatest disadvantage. Again and again I saw a white, birdlike figure dart upon one of the hairy men, and, grasping him, soar aloft to a dizzy height and then dash him unerringly into the midst of his compatriots below. It was a sickening sight to see these forms come hurtling down from the air to their death, and usually the death of one or two of their own number on the ground. Except for the guttural cries of the Zoags, the whole battle was conducted in a

ghastly silence, which served only to accentuate the deadly precision of the bat-men's maneuvering and the fierce earnestness of the battle.

We still could not find any trace of the professor. The cage in which he had been confined was now empty. Whether he was dead or alive, we could not even guess. But still we searched. Our presence had been undiscovered, so intent had the Zoags been upon throwing off their adversaries. We discovered that the square where the princess and the professor had been exhibited was in reality only one of the squares of the town, and not the principal one of all. The main square was farther away from the water, and as we approached it, we could see in that strange lurid light that we had noticed earlier in the day—I use the word “day” for want of a better, in this place where there is no day or night—we saw a vast crowd of Zoags massed intently about some central figures.

These were evidently the priests, or their equivalent in the society of the ape-men. They were robed in flowing hoods which made them look grotesque and fearful. Griggs with his usual reference actually expressed the situation as I felt it. He put his mouth close to my ear, and muttered: “I’ve said all along we were not far from the Old Man, sir, and now, bli’me wot with this awful ’eat, and them there devils, I’m beginning to think we’ll taste brimstone ourselves pretty soon.”

“Nonsense,” I replied, though I myself was at a loss to explain some of the things, particularly the strange red glare and the ever-increasing heat. That there was no fire down here we had long since learned, but if this was not the reflection of a great conflagration, I could not guess what it might be.

Griggs had been fearfully peering ahead. “Nonsense, is it, sir? Well, just you look closely. Them there devils has got the professor there, and

shoot me if they're not proddin' 'im with pitchforks! And—my God, sir—look there! If that's not flame what else is it? We're in for it now, sir!"

I LOOKED in the direction Griggs indicated, and my heart quailed within me. He was right. There, truly, was a great tongue of flame, licking hungrily at the dry foliage. As I looked, I saw not one, but dozens, of these tongues, and while I watched them spread I heard the crackle of the fire as the woolly foliage yielded to its embrace. The whole place was burning! But the priests paid no heed.

"We've got to get the professor out of this, right now," I said.

Griggs looked at me in horror. "But you can't get a man out of 'ell, sir!" he said.

"Don't talk nonsense," I said sharply, for I knew that, though Griggs was second to none in courage, nevertheless his superstitious fears might make a coward out of him.

I saw his eyes anxiously scanning the spreading flames, and the true explanation came to me in a flash.

"You started that fire yourself, Griggs," I accused him, hoping to arouse him from his abstraction.

"I? For the love—'ave you gone crazy, sir? I started it?"

"Just that, and nothing less."

"'Ow can you say that, sir? Wot with them devils there with pitchforks, and one thing and another, I expect they'll soon 'ave us a-shovel-in' coal on to the fire ourselves, if we don't 'urry away."

"We've got to hurry away without doubt," I answered, "but we must rescue the professor first. The flames will spread in every direction, and engulf the whole of this underworld in a few hours. Can't you see by the way they are spreading that they are fed by virgin material? Flame was unheard of down here

until we came with our grenades and mitrailleuses and such death-dealing incendiary devices from the surface. We have started a fire down here that can't be put out."

Griggs thought for a moment. "I guess you're right, sir," he said, rather shamefacedly, but with his courage obviously on the return. "I was a bit reckless with my fire when all them ape-men was after me."

"No doubt about it. The very unconcern of the Zoags shows that they have not yet noticed what is upon them. They don't know what fire is."

"Well, they'll soon find out, and it's our chance to rescue the professor—that is, if they don't *Joost* him before we can get him free," answered Griggs.

All this time we had been advancing cautiously upon the assembled throng, and now we were quite close. We remained concealed behind a small clump of the woolly trees, which grew quite close to the center of the square. I noticed with great interest that the professor was strapped to the ground with only the flimsiest of tethers, and it would be the work of only a few seconds to release him.

As the flames gradually advanced upon the crowd, I saw a few of them stop to look with astonishment upon the strange red glare that slowly approached them. Some of the more curious of them left the scene of the *Joost* to examine the fire at closer quarters. It was indeed a pitiful sight to watch these ape-creatures as they tried to pluck the fire from the burning trees and bushes. Their guttural cries attracted their comrades away from the *Joost* ceremonial, and gradually they drifted away from the center of the square, and at first in surprise, then in fear, stood in a mass, unwillingly backing away from the ever-devouring monster that advanced relentlessly upon them. They tried in their ignorance

to push it back with their great hairy arms, as though it were something solid to be lifted or moved about. Great was their terror when singed and burning arms told them that such methods would not avail.

We had seized the opportunity to approach the professor and release him. We had little difficulty in unloosing the knots, and had commenced to assist our friend to his feet when we were discovered.

"Run for it—quick!" I said. Together, we half carried, half dragged the professor from the square, with a hundred Zoags in pursuit. We were just approaching the trees, when we saw with consternation that other Zoags barred the way.

Already they had Griggs in their grasp, and were advancing upon the professor and me. There was nothing to do but fire. I leveled my revolver, and aimed at their leader. There was a spurt of flame, and he fell. The others looked on in astonishment. But they were not to be repelled by one shot. Another, and still another, I fired, and each time a Zoag fell. I abhorred having to kill defenseless creatures in this way, but it was our lives or theirs, and I hoped they would soon see the folly of attempting to stop us. It seemed that they did, for at length they hung back, but still they blocked our path.

Griggs had succeeded in releasing himself, and we three stood still confronting the momentarily baffled but unquestionably hostile throng. Behind us we could hear the infuriated cries of the priests and their followers as they tried to battle the flames. A barrier of fire now separated us from our pursuers, so that if we were safe from attack that way, we were also unable to escape or retreat. Our plight seemed indeed hopeless. As we reloaded our revolvers, expecting another onslaught, our eyes roved in all directions, anxiously seeking a way out. We could discover none,

but suddenly help came in a form as unexpected as it was welcome.

Out of the air there swooped a hundred of the winged creatures whom we had for the moment forgotten. At their head was that young man who had sworn to defend us if it were ever in his power—the beloved son of Diegon, whom we had once rescued from the Zoags. How he had learned of our plight I never was to discover, but it was probably through telepathy in a message which he had either received direct from our distressed minds or from his sister, the Princess Thalia that I loved, whose mind was, I knew, keenly attuned to my own.

BEFORE the astonished ape-men could defend themselves, they were snatched from the ground, almost simultaneously, and hurled hither and thither, their bodies being dashed to pieces on the rocks and the ground. We stood unmolested.

"Flee!" came to me in a single word, as clearly as if spoken into my ear by their leader, as he brushed past me with his warriors to battle with others of the enemy. And flee we did. Staggering, and stumbling, we finally emerged from the forest.

Around us raged the awful carnage. White wings grappled with green arms, grunts turned to groans, blood flowed freely. And lending a lurid horror to everything was the red terror of the flames—the fire which the inhabitants of this dark world had never known until we had turned the explosive and incendiary devices of the surface upon their helpless masses. The cities of the Zoags were blazing, and crumbling to ashes. Even the beautiful city of Thorium had caught the fire, and the flames greedily licked about the beautiful walls and columned courts which the art of the bat-men had erected. I swallowed hard at sight of this dreadful destruction.

But a new peril confronted us. It was long before I understood what it was. The burning cities emitted a heat that made the place, always hot, now well-nigh unbearable. The choking fumes irritated our parched throats and made us gasp for breath. Everywhere around us the struggling fighters seemed to be slowly overcome. They appeared to be slowly choking; their movements became sluggish, like the figures in a slow-motion picture. Their thrust and parry failed of its intent. Sweat rolled from them. As I looked, drawing deep breaths, unable to comprehend what was taking place, I noticed that the lurid flames were rapidly dying away.

Suddenly the professor caught my arm. "The *Atlantis*—quick!" he gasped, dragging me away from the scene.

I had barely strength to follow him.

"What's wrong? I can't get me bearings," said Griggs.

"No oxygen," answered the professor. "Save your breath to get you to the *Atlantis*. It is our only hope now."

I began to understand then. For some reason the pumping-system had failed. The suction of air from the world outside had ceased, and the place was being rapidly robbed of all its air. That fact accounted for the choking sensation that I had experienced. That was why the flames had died away when seemingly at their height.

We struggled forward like men in a dream. Our lungs felt as though they must burst. We drew wheezing breaths of the polluted air, which seemed to fill us with lead instead of life. Slowly our dragging steps took us to the small craft wherein our hope of safety lay. It looked truly like home to us now. It was the one thing that could preserve our lives, for a few hours at least.

We saw the water a few yards

away from us. The sight of it gladdened our hearts. In a few minutes we should be safely aboard the *Atlantis*, and out of danger for a short while, at least. But our hopes were rudely dashed to the ground.

Griggs was the first to make the discovery. He cried out with a low moan, "The *Atlantis*! It's gone!"

He was right. Search as we might, we could find no trace of the craft that stood at that moment for life itself.

WE STOOD at the water's edge in dismay. There now seemed nothing to do except to lie down and die. But the professor, who seemed to require less oxygen than Griggs and I, had been inspecting the water at our feet.

"Of course—that would be it!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"What would, sir?" said Griggs apathetically.

"Why—the *Atlantis* is submerged in a few feet of water here. If there were more light, I doubt not we could see her hull. One of us must have forgotten to turn off the controls when we left the ship the last time with the machine-gun. Don't you remember?"

"I believe you are right," I said.

"I'll soon find out," said Griggs, and the brave fellow stripped off his coat and staggered to the brink of the water.

I remembered how Griggs had saved us once before when the tentacles of the gigantic octopus bade fair to draw us into its maw. But now he was wounded, and his strength had almost failed. Besides, he was not a powerful swimmer, resembling most seafaring men in this respect.

"Stay awhile; I will go," I said.

This was no time for argument, so after pushing the weakened Griggs aside I drew a deep breath of the foul air and plunged into the water.

The professor's surmise had been accurate. The *Atlantis* lay gently on the bottom. Strange fishes and monsters of this underground lake swam about her stout hull. My lungs began to feel heavy. I swam around the craft, seeking the hatch by which to enter. It loomed large and distorted before me. A great bell began to toll in my head, and my eyes smarted, as I wrenched at the covering. My strength was beginning to fail, when I got it loose. At last it came open.

I entered the compartment, and opened the door connecting with the inside of the *Atlantis*. A flood of water followed me into the submarine. I had no time to pump out the water from the connecting-chamber. I had already closed the outer hatch, and only the water in the chamber could follow me into the craft. The pure, sweet air of the interior of the submersible was like wine in my veins.

Switching on the lights with trembling hand, I stood astounded at the sight that met my eyes. A hideous monster clung to the elevating-control and glared at me with glassy eyes. It was one of the Zoags. In a trice all was clear to me. He had entered the submarine, and not knowing how to operate it, had caused it to submerge, but was quite unable to raise it.

He offered no resistance as I stepped to his side, and, roughly pushing him aside, threw the necessary controls to bring the *Atlantis* to the surface. I felt the craft slowly rising, and I prayed that I might not be too late to rescue my friends. A thought came to me. I took the diving-costume from the locker where it was kept, and hastily donned it.

By the time this was done, the *Atlantis* was resting at the surface. I paid no attention to the Zoag, who crouched in a corner in an attitude of terror. I sprang out on deck, and, leaping across the small strip of

water that separated the *Atlantis* from the shore, ran to my two companions.

Griggs was unconscious. The professor lay on the ground, wheezing. I picked the little cockney up, and ran to the *Atlantis*. Opening the main hatch, I hastily dropped him inside. My method was rough, but this was no time for ceremony. The professor, understanding that I had been able to recover the *Atlantis*, had risen to his knees, and was endeavoring to crawl to the water. I grasped him by the waist, and ran to the submersible. It had edged away from the shore somewhat, but I had little difficulty in leaping across. As the professor and I entered the ship, a dark green form darted past, and out on deck, and thence to the shore. It was the Zoag.

"Poor fool!" I thought. "He does not know that a worse peril awaits him out there."

Griggs and the professor were reviving rapidly. I still had on the diving-suit that I had donned sometime earlier. Without it, I knew that I should be helpless in the outside air. While I was convinced that the inhabitants of this strange underworld were now beyond all aid, I experienced, nevertheless, a nameless urge, an intense longing, which I was at a loss to formulate in any definite train of thought. I was drawn once more to leave the craft, and I clumsily crawled ashore in the diving-suit. With feet that were leaden I slowly walked once more the magnificent avenues of Thorium.

THE flames had almost died away now, being stifled by the absence of air. Only a flickering of ugly reddish light and a heavy pall of smoke told of the destruction that had been wrought here until a few minutes ago. Around me lay countless bat-men, their beautiful forms gasping in the throes of suffocation. I felt sick and faint as I viewed them.

Their only hope lay in the recommencement of the power-plant, and I was quite ignorant of the principles of its operation.

My footsteps approached the great hall, where Diegon had held his councils for so many centuries. Never again would it glitter with the splendor of this hidden civilization. They had conquered Death for centuries, but at last Death had claimed them for his own.

The air within the hall was singularly lucid. The haze of smoke and the devouring flames had not encroached here. Under the normal bluish green of the radium illumination that the men of Thorium had adopted to combat their darkness, it looked peaceful and stately as ever. But I knew that it was the peace of Death.

I saw two forms upon the dais, and as I approached with trembling knees, I knew whose they were. Enthroned, majestic and noble as ever sat the great Diegon. His face between convulsive gasps was placid and content. His wings enfolded that other whom I had come to love—his daughter Thalia. Salt tears fell from my eyes as I looked at these two from behind the glass of the diving-helmet. The love and the wisdom that had guided a kingdom, here united in death! But they were not dead, though I knew it was only a matter of minutes before the end must come. Their tired and heavy eyes scarcely looked upon me. They could never have recognized me in the diving-suit, but through the medium of that upon which the Thoriumites relied more than anything else, thought, they knew who stood before them.

Gently disentangling herself from the embrace of her father, the beautiful Thalia, queenly, but unsteady, advanced toward me. With a sob, I took her into my arms. Her face was pressed close to the thick glass of the diving-suit, but her eyes could gaze

into mine. Her rich lips were pressed against the clammy glass, and separated by its thickness, mine met hers. Stranger kiss could never have been given or taken! Her face fell into lines of perfect happiness, and while her eyes closed, and her breath faded into imperceptible gasps, I held her tightly in my arms, the tears falling, and the salt rheum stinging my tongue.

Gently I carried her to the dais, and with trembling arms gave that which I loved more than anything else back to her father. His eyes opened when I folded the gossamer wings about his daughter once more, and from his fast-failing brain there came the words: "My son, you have done well. This is the end. But perchance we shall meet again in that place of which you have told me. May it be so! Farewell."

Words failed me. I turned, and fled from the hall. The last long look that I took at them before I passed out into the open showed me these two creatures, united in death, as they had been in life, folded in each other's embrace, their faces turned to the skies, as though defying Death itself.

MY STEPS soon brought me to the *Atlantis* again, and I found my two companions now greatly recovered, and impatient to leave. I told them that Diegon and his daughter, as well as the rest of the inhabitants of Thorium, were dying, and they agreed that we could not hope to do anything for them. It was doubtful if we could transport Diegon or his daughter to the craft, and even if we did, we could only keep them alive for a few hours. The supply of air was limited, and we had put our equipment to hard use during the few weeks that it had been installed. It would be impossible to replenish the air supply now, without further access to fresh air, and as we possessed only three diving-suits, it

would have been quite impossible to aid the others in that precarious escape which we now contemplated.

We strapped to our backs as much of the compressed meats and other foods as we could carry, and taking with us a spare cylinder of oxygen apiece, we ran the *Atlantis* into a small cove, in fact the same one from which the Zoag had carried the professor away, and leaving the ship for the last time, we plodded up the steep incline that led to the power-house.

As we ascended the pathway, we noticed great masses of the radium ore, the pitchblende which the power plant had been accustomed to employ as fuel. The professor, whom nothing could deter from his scientific investigations, had slipped into his pocket a small piece of lead pipe when we left the *Atlantis*. I had not troubled to inquire why he should wish to burden himself with an extra and apparently unnecessary load, but its use now became apparent. He had stopped, and carefully approaching one of the heaps, had extracted several grams of something. I afterward learned that it was radium in the pure state. This he carefully placed in the piece of lead pipe, and closing the ends by treading upon them, he rejoined us, and we proceeded upon our journey.

Around the main gate of the power-house a sad sight met our eyes. Dodd, that brother and image of Diegon, lay dead, surrounded by a circle of dead Zoags. He had, evidently, put up a brave fight to keep the motors running. The evidence of superior numbers was everywhere apparent, however, and he had been brutally killed by the enemies. Now they lay gasping for the air that their own act had deprived them of.

Since our own air supply was precious, we did not linger but approached the mouth of the tunnel, which we had surmised connected this underworld with the earth

above. We unslung the lanterns and grappling-hooks which we had brought with us, and prepared for the journey to the surface. Fortunately the lanterns were electric, and would therefore burn without air. I led the way, the professor coming next, and Griggs bringing up the rear.

We were soon swallowed up by the darkness, and saw nothing beyond what our own meager light showed us. One thing, however, gave us hope. Everywhere the evidences of suction were apparent. They hung like the stringy, cobweblike stuff one sees around electric fans, and they carried unmistakable evidence of origin at the surface. Here a dead leaf, that had once been green; there a piece of twig; and most remarkable of all, a discarded cigarette of a make well known and popular at the surface some fifteen years ago, lying wedged in a crevice here, just as if its owner had carelessly tossed it aside yesterday.

For hours we toiled, in an ever more steeply ascending climb, until at last our way became almost vertical. This it was that we dreaded, for it would be a hundred times more difficult to climb an upright shaft, assisted only by grappling-irons, no matter how many projections were afforded us.

We had tested the presence of air by trying occasionally to strike a match. There was air present, but not in quantities large enough for us to dispense with the helmets. This constituted our major difficulty; for we could not eat until we were able to remove the helmets, and to do this we must have air. At last, however, the matches which we struck glowed brilliantly, and we stopped to rest and remove our helmets.

We ate heartily, as may well be imagined after the difficult climb.

"How much farther do you suppose we've got to climb, sir?" said

Griggs, after we had refreshed ourselves.

The professor knit his brows in perplexity.

"I really have no idea," he answered, after some thought. "It would under ordinary circumstances be possible to obtain some idea of our depth by a calculation based upon the pressure at the surface, and the pressure here. Even the fact of the existence of air here would, under ordinary conditions, enable us to arrive at some conclusion. But all calculations would be futile, because the men of Thorium have been sucking air from the surface, and therefore the presence of air here does not denote very much."

"What to my mind does denote a great deal, however, is the fact that the shaft is now nearly vertical," I hazarded.

"Yes. That is undoubtedly important. The resistless forces of the ancient volcano which found vent through this tube must have united upon establishing their path to the surface, and flowed in a vertical path."

"At that rate we should not have very much farther to go," I said.

"Am I dreaming, or do you see what I see?" interrupted Griggs excitedly.

With one accord, the professor and I looked in the direction Griggs indicated. What we expected to see we knew not, but what we did see was surprising enough, and simple enough, but of more comfort to us than all the theorizing which we had been engaged upon to stimulate our spirits.

Griggs had risen, and advanced slowly, as though fearful his eyes might still be deceiving him. Stooping gingerly, he reached for it, and grasped the small object that had attracted his attention. A cigarette! Partly smoked, and thrown away evidently in a careless gesture, it lay here, miles below the surface of the

earth, as serene as though tossed there yesterday by its owner.

He brought it to us, and I took it in my hand and examined it carefully. "Pearl," I read. "I have never heard of that brand."

"I've seen 'em, sir. When 'is Majesty's fleet visited 'Ong-Kong, sir, I bought some of 'em, sir. Over in Kowloon, sir, I bought 'em."

I passed the cigarette to the professor, who examined it with care. "Griggs is right," he said. "There are Chinese characters on the paper."

"Well, I wouldn't mind if we climbed out of this hole, and found ourselves in 'Ong-Kong," said Griggs. "I 'ad a girl there once, and she——"

The professor had returned the cigarette to him, and the story of Griggs' girl was terminated by a few puffs which he took from the "Pearl" which he had lighted.

Greatly heartened at this new evidence that we were on the right track, we soon resumed our arduous climb, after taking the precaution to tie a rope around the waists of all three of us, in case one should miss his footing. As it happened, this precaution saved the life of the professor, whose sight was not so good as my own.

THE story of that terrible ascent need not be told here. It need only be stated that for three days and three nights—though we only knew this by our watches—we toiled with aching limbs and torn hands up that nightmare of rock and lava. Our supply of water ran out, and we were forced to refresh ourselves at the tiny springs which occasionally dripped through the walls of the lava tube.

At last, when the air had become rich and pure, and the sea breeze more noticeable, we emerged almost without warning into the world again. We must have completed the last part of our climb during the night,

for with the breaking of dawn a great, jagged hole loomed directly above us, faintly pink with the rose of the morning sun. After another hour of travel we staggered out into the fresh beauty of morning.

We were saved! Exhaustion now overcame us, and we lay upon the ground in complete fatigue. The professor was the first to recover, and, seeing a large butterfly, he started off in pursuit. For the first time in my life I realized the value of butterfly-hunting. The professor had discovered a species of *Lepidoptera* which told him that we were in Polynesia.

"It's all right with me, if we're not on some cannibal island. Maybe this is the place where they ate Captain Cook," said Griggs, wryly.

We were in a huge bowl covered with grassy verdure. It was evidently the crater of an extinct volcano. The professor's prediction was accurate, as we soon found out. It was not long before we met a man clothed in Oriental attire. He was, as we soon learned, a Japanese, and resident of the Samoan Islands. We had made our return to the earth through an extinct volcano.

Soon we took steamer for Honolulu, and thence to San Francisco, where we were regarded as the victims of some great shock, chiefly shipwreck; as maniacs, or unadulterated frauds, according to the persons who heard our story.

Finally the professor bethought him of the radium which he had brought so carefully in the piece of lead pipe. Even this did not suffice to convince the skeptical minds of those who heard our story. We therefore sold the radium to a great institution, and the sum we received was enough to make the three of us independently wealthy for the rest of our lives.

One day the professor and I sadly said good-bye to the glorified Griggs, as he proudly walked aboard the great *Leviathan* in New York, resplendent in fur coat, spats and big cigar, with half a dozen porters carrying his numerous trunks and baggage.

My heart was still sick for that wonderful creature, Thalia, who lay dead in the arms of her venerable father miles below us, but I swallowed hard, and gripped the hand of our good friend, as the going-ashore whistle blew.

[THE END]

Under the Moon

By EUGENE C. DOLSON

In the hours of sunlight, ghosts are lazy;
They hide in caverns and sleep by day.
When the moon's at full and the winds are crazy,
Oh, then is the time ghosts have their way.

In the woods tonight are a thousand devils—
The trees are rocking with all their might;
And the sprites and goblins hold their revels
Under the moon this windy night.